"THE FAMILY STONE"

(*Hating Her*) a.k.a. "The Family Stone"

by

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OVER BLACK:

The song "The Lonely Goatherd" from **The Sound of Music** begins and plays over the next few scenes.

EXT. FIFTH AVENUE AND 57TH STREET - NEW YORK - DAY

A giant illuminated snowflake is suspended over the street's intersection, beneath which, EVERETT STONE, navigates his way against a tide of office workers and last-minute Christmas shoppers.

Everett draws the attention of passersby, not merely because he is the only person headed in one direction, but because he is Kennedy-handsome, with an open face and easy smile. In his mid-thirties, Everett is dressed as one of privilege in a dark charcoal suit, pewter satin tie and top coat.

EXT. PARK AVENUE - NEW YORK - DAY

Everett rounds a corner onto Park Avenue.

He approaches an office building in front of which a female African-American Salvation Army SANTA CLAUSE rings a bell. "The Lonely Goatherd" issues from a boom-box on the ground at her feet.

SANTA CLAUSE
Ho! Ho! Ho! Merry Christmas!

Everett tries to enter the building, but the sheer volume of people flooding from its doors creates a challenge.

SANTA CLAUSE (CONT'D)
You're going the wrong way.

EVERETT
Tell me about it.

Santa Clause opens the door in front of which she stands, holding it for Everett, who drops change in her bucket and dodges inside.

EVERETT (CONT'D)
Merry Christmas.

Inside, Everett races past the security reception desk and is called back to sign in.

INT. OFFICES - DAY

"The Lonely Goatherd" cuts out and Everett travels in silence, down a long row of abandoned work cubicles, set in a line in front of dark offices.

Gray light slants in from the picture windows facing Park Avenue. The only sound is the thrum of holiday traffic outside.

In the distance, outside a lit corner office, the top of someone's head is just visible above their work partition.

INT. OFFICES/CUBICLE - DAY

CINDY, a harried worker in her mid-twenties, sits in her coat, talking on the phone.

CINDY
I guess we could try for the 3:05, now. Believe me, I'm trying, but the bitch won't leave--

Cindy freezes, as if caught, when she sees Everett standing there, smiling.

EVERETT
Cindy, go home.

CINDY
Right.

MEREDITH (O.S.)
I need Ken Kiosa!

Cindy merely closes her eyes.

INT. MEREDITH'S OFFICE - DAY

MEREDITH
This is Meredith Morton. I need to speak--

MEREDITH MORTON, an immaculately, if rigidly composed woman in her mid-thirties, stands at her desk. She wears a charcoal gray suit that silhouettes her striking figure and matches Everett's nearly exactly. Tightly wound, her hair is pinned in a precise French twist.

SPEAKER PHONE
I'm sorry, Mr. Kiosa has left for the holiday--

Meredith stabs a button on her phone, disconnecting.

MEREDITH
(contemptuously)
Useless. *Christmas.*

EVERETT
You were the one who wanted to beat traffic.

Meredith jumps at Everett's appearance in her office.

MEREDITH
Oh, Jesus! Everett!
(looks at her watch)
What time is it?

EVERETT
Two hours later. You wouldn't, by any chance, be trying to avoid meeting my family, would you?

MEREDITH
I can not *wait* to--

CINDY (O.S.)
Your sister's still on hold!

MEREDITH
(holding up a finger)
Just two more calls.

INT. OFFICES - DAY

Everett carries Meredith, slung over his shoulder, back the way he came, trailed by Cindy, hustling to keep up.

MEREDITH
Have Julie call me on my cell. If Ken Kiosa calls, tell him I've started disbarring proceedings against him. I need his papers faxed to Brent, who needs to message me as soon as he's seen them.

INT. OFFICES - ELEVATOR - DAY

Meredith's cell phone begins ringing as Everett sets her on her feet in the elevator, Cindy standing just outside.

MEREDITH
And try Ernie Blair again, he should be on the ground by now. He was supposed to send me the Kim report before--

Meredith pulls out her phone as Everett pushes the lobby button.

MEREDITH (CONT'D)
This is Meredith.

EVERETT
Merry Christmas, Cindy.

CINDY
Merry Christmas. And, thanks.

MEREDITH
Hello?!

Everett nudges Meredith, indicating Cindy.

MEREDITH (CONT'D)
Oh! Merry Christ--. You'll have your cell, right?

The doors begin to close.

MEREDITH (CONT'D)
There's no reception in here!

As the doors meet, "The Lonely Goatherd" begins again.

TITLES AND CREDITS

"The Lonely Goatherd" plays over a series of vintage images of Christmas, each carrying a different film credit.

The last of these "Christmas cards" depicts a large house, set back on a lawn. In need of a fresh coat of white paint, but with all its black shutters intact, the Stone family's home speaks as much about classic New England durability as a well-worn pair of boots from L. L. Bean.

A simple spruce Christmas wreath hangs on the bright red front door, covering the door's window, on which a "Free Tibet" bumper sticker is fixed.

EXT. STONE HOUSE - DAY

A Range Rover pulls up in the driveway to the left side of the house, near the side kitchen door and its steps.

THAD STONE and PATRICK THOMAS climb out of the car and begin unloading groceries from the back.

Both men, in their early thirties, have an easy handsomeness, enhanced by fastidious grooming. Both men tend toward Yankee conservatism in clothing. In fact, the only discernible difference between them is that Patrick is African American.

INT. STONE HOUSE - LIVING ROOM - DAY

A towering half-decorated Christmas tree twinkles with lights. At the base of the tree, surrounded by dog-eared boxes of ornaments, SYBIL STONE perches on the edge of an ottoman.

Strikingly beautiful in a vaguely exotic way, Sybil is in her late fifties or early sixties. It is easy to imagine the beauty she was at twenty, though she bears a very recent note of brittleness and fatigue.

She holds a snowflake-shaped ornament in her hand, but stares off into space, at nothing.

INT. STONE HOUSE - BACK HALL - DAY

Burdened with the grocery bags, Thad and Patrick stumble into the narrow back hall--off of which there is a small half bathroom, an entrance to the kitchen, and a back staircase.

THAD
Mom! Merry Christmas!

There is something just slightly "off" about Thad's voice.

A dog starts barking.

INT. STONE HOUSE - LIVING ROOM - DAY

Sybil snaps out of her reverie.

SYBIL
Boys! Boys!

With a flourish, she hangs the snowflake ornament on the tree and runs to meet Thad and Patrick.

INT. STONE HOUSE - KITCHEN - DAY

SAM, an ancient black Labrador, jumps on Thad as he and Patrick hoist the groceries onto the counters.

SYBIL
You're here!!

Sybil enters, throwing herself into Thad. They embrace.

PATRICK
We hit traffic.

Sybil moves over to Patrick, giving him a huge hug and kiss.

SYBIL
Wait! Patrick, I found another recipe on the Gourmet site this morning...

Sybil moves over to the large kitchen table, set in the curve of a bay window. The table holds a desktop computer and stacks and stacks and stacks of Christmas cards. She begins pecking at the computer's keys.

PATRICK
It better not be for onions, I e-mailed you my mother's recipe this morning...

THAD
Mom.

Sybil turns to look at Thad.

THAD (CONT'D)
When's Everett getting here?

Thad uses sign language to speak.

**NOTE:** Thad is completely deaf, and though he is able to read lips, he and the family always sign to each other. Thad also makes an effort to speak when he signs.

SYBIL
He promised they'd be here by dinner.

THAD
Where's Dad?

SYBIL
He's still up on campus.

PATRICK
Did you hear from Ben? We didn't know when his flight was getting in--

SYBIL
Well, of course, he missed both morning flights--

The back door opens.

SYBIL (CONT'D)
There's your father.
(calling)
Kelly, we're in here!

KELLY STONE enters from the back hall.

In his late sixties, Kelly is still an impressive, strapping figure. Tall, with an out-sized head covered with a thatch of chaotic silver hair, Kelly carries a weathered briefcase and a paper plate wrapped in clear plastic.

KELLY
(holding up the plate)
Millie's famous brownies!

SYBIL
That is so sweet of her. Those are all for me!

THAD
Dad!

KELLY
Thaddeus!

Kelly embraces Thad, and then Patrick. They all kiss.

PATRICK
Merry Christmas.

EXT. STONE HOUSE -DAY

Amy's battered Volvo pulls in behind Thad and Patrick's car.

INT. STONE HOUSE - KITCHEN - DAY

Through the window over the sink, Patrick can see Amy as she gets out of her car and pulls her bags from the back.

PATRICK
Amy's here!

AMY STONE, the youngest of the Stone family, in her late twenties, bears her luminous natural beauty with an aggressive indifference. Her clothes are shapeless, if colorful.

PATRICK (CONT'D)
(to himself)
She's still driving that thing?

Outside, the strap on one of Amy's public television totes breaks and its contents fall into a puddle on the driveway.

Amy just stands for a moment. Then she savagely throws the rest of her bags to the ground and stoops to retrieve her papers and books from the water.

INT. EVERETT'S CAR - DAY - MOVING

On the last note of "The Lonely Goatherd:" Meredith closes her cell phone and smiles apologetically at Everett.

MEREDITH
Sorry.

She turns her attention to the scenery as they ride in silence.

Meredith clears her throat, an unconscious tic.

Everett smiles and reaches for Meredith's hand.

EVERETT
You don't need to be nervous.

MEREDITH
(matter-of-factly)
I'm not.

Everett's smile falters and he turns his attention back to the road.

EVERETT
They're going to love you.

EXT. ROAD - DAY

Everett's car shoots past a sign: Town of Amherst.

INT. STONE HOUSE - KITCHEN - DAY

AMY
I fucking hate her!

KELLY
(reproving)
Amy.

AMY
What?

KELLY
(coaching)
Generosity. Generosity of spirit.

Amy looks to Sybil who just laughs.

SYBIL
You just tell it like it is, honey.

PATRICK
I thought no one had met her.

AMY
No, I was down in New York in October--

KELLY
Oh, that's right! That young man. What is his name?

SYBIL
(warningly)
Kelly--

KELLY
How's that all working out?

Amy blinks fiercely but says nothing. She turns her attention to unlacing her boots as Sam licks her face.

KELLY (CONT'D)
Oh, honey. I'm sorry...

SYBIL
So, you had dinner with them--

AMY
She's a total phoney. So uptight! *You* are going to hate her.

SYBIL
(savoring the name, evilly)
*Meredith.*

AMY
*Plus*, she's got this incredibly grotesque throat-clearing tic. Ecgh-Mm. Ecgh-Mm! It's like she's digging for clams.

The back door bangs open and ANDREW TROUSDALE, six years old, pounds into the room where he stands, fists raised, directly in front of Sybil.

ANDREW
(imitating DeNiro)
You talkin' to me?

SYBIL
You talkin' to me?

ANDREW
You talkin' to me, friend?

Sybil hugs Andrew as Susannah enters, burdened with bags.

SUSANNAH
Make way for ducklings!

SUSANNAH STONE-TROUSDALE, in her late thirties, is the oldest of all the Stone children, and so clearly the beauty Sybil was at her age. She carries her looks with a graceful effortlessness, though she is eight months pregnant.

Thad moves to help her as ELIZABETH TROUSDALE, ten years old, shoots past and runs to Sybil.

ELIZABETH
Grandma!

SYBIL
(high falsetto)
Is that my princess? Is my princess here?

Sybil embraces Elizabeth.

SUSANNAH
Mom, no fairy-queen voice, okay? It was a long drive.

PATRICK
Susannah!

SUSANNAH
Speaking of fairy-queens!

Everyone kisses and embraces. Susannah tends to hang closer to Thad. They sign little secrets to one another.

SUSANNAH (CONT'D)
Is Everett here yet?

SYBIL
Amy was just telling us all about *Meredith*. She's a throat-clearer.

AMY
ECGH-MM!

SUSANNAH
Shouldn't they be here? Where's Ben?

SYBIL
He got a later flight.

SUSANNAH
I couldn't get him on the phone. I would have picked him up.

SYBIL
Okay. Okay. Back to Meredith.

KELLY
Sybil--

SYBIL
What?

PATRICK
Why are you encouraging her?
(to Amy)
You never like anyone.

AMY
Patrick?

Patrick turns from the sink to face Amy.

AMY (CONT'D)
I love you.

THAD
That took years.

AMY
Suss, didn't you say you got her on the phone once?

SUSANNAH
(thinks for a moment)
Brusk.

AMY
She do that throat thing for you?

SUSANNAH
I don't remember.

Thad turns from the window and begins to sign excitedly.

THAD
They're here!

INT. EVERETT'S CAR - STONE HOUSE DRIVEWAY - DAY

EVERETT
You ready?

Meredith looks speculatively at the house.

EVERETT (CONT'D)
They're all watching, you know. Kelly'll come out in a minute and bring us in.

INT. STONE HOUSE - KELLY'S STUDY - DAY

Everyone is crowded at the front windows, looking out at the car in the driveway.

KELLY
Fine lot, all of you.

Kelly snatches up an old Leica camera and heads out.

From inside the house, everyone watches Everett circle the car and open the passenger door.

SUSANNAH
She's dressed him.

Meredith tentatively steps out of the car.

SYBIL
(laughing)
Oh, my god.

AMY
I told you!

EXT. STONE HOUSE DRIVEWAY - DAY

Kelly embraces Everett and then turns to Meredith, who offers her hand for him to shake.

INT. STONE HOUSE - KELLY'S STUDY - DAY

THAD
He'll go for the hug, now.

Outside, Kelly hugs Meredith, who awkwardly obliges.

SUSANNAH
Don't they look just like Miss Hathaway and Mr. Drysdale?

PATRICK
You people are horrible.

INT. STONE HOUSE - FRONT HALL - DAY

Meredith is introduced to everyone, inside the front door. Sam, circling Meredith, keeps trying to get his nose between her legs.

EVERETT
Meredith, this is Thad! And Patrick--

SYBIL
Sam, stop it!

MEREDITH
OH, Yes. Thaddeus, HELLO! I'M MEREDITH!! I'VE HEARD SO MUCH ABOUT YOU!!

She shakes hands vigorously with Thad. She spots Amy and hugs her.

MEREDITH (CONT'D)
*Amy!*

THAD
(to Susannah)
Why is she shouting?

AMY
(icily, disengaging herself)
Hi.

EVERETT
And this is Sybil! Mom, this is Meredith.

MEREDITH
What a lovely home you have!

SYBIL
(coolly, enjoying herself)
All the better to entertain you, my dear.

Meredith sees Kelly give Sybil a shove from behind.

SYBIL (CONT'D)
Welcome. Merry Christmas.

EVERETT
Susannah! Help!

SUSANNAH
I'm Susannah. And this is Elizabeth--

ELIZABETH
You have nice shoes.

SUSANNAH
And Andrew...Andrew, aren't you going to say "hi?"

ANDREW
(indifferently, wandering away)
Hi.

KELLY
Okay, now! Let me get a picture!

AMY
I want a picture with Everett!

EVERETT
Where's Ben?

MEREDITH
Excuse me.

Meredith slips out the front door.

EXT. STONE HOUSE - DRIVEWAY - DAY

EVERETT
Meredith!

Everett catches up with her as she's opening the driver's side door to get in.

EVERETT (CONT'D)
What are you doing?

MEREDITH
They hate me. I'm going home.

EVERETT
(laughing)
You can't be serious.

MEREDITH
They hate me.

EVERETT
They just met you.

Meredith gives Everett a long look.

EVERETT (CONT'D)
Give it a chance.

MEREDITH
I did.

EVERETT
Meredith--

INT. STONE HOUSE - EVERETT'S BEDROOM - DAY

MEREDITH
Absolutely not.

EVERETT
Why are you making a big deal out of this? Can it really matter?

MEREDITH
Um, yes, I think it matters. And, no, I am not sleeping with you in your bed in your parent's house.

EVERETT
But Sybil put us in here!

MEREDITH
It's not right.

INT. STONE HOUSE - KITCHEN - DAY

While Meredith and Everett are upstairs, everyone has come to cluster here.

SYBIL
Kelly, stop giving me that look. I didn't say anything to her!

Kelly pulls a face.

Susannah, propped up in a chair, keeps a lookout on the hall.

SUSANNAH
So, who told her I'm the nice one?

PATRICK
I think she thought Amy was the nice one.

THAD
Yeah, well, she's really re-thinking that now, isn't she?

From her station, Susannah sees Everett come down the stairs and enter the living room with an arm-load of blankets and a pillow.

SUSANNAH
(under her breath)
Red alert. Red alert!

INT. STONE HOUSE - LIVING ROOM - DAY

Sybil keeps Everett from spreading a blanket on the couch.

SYBIL
You're telling me you guys don't fuck?

EVERETT
That's really nice, Mom.

SYBIL
Such total hypocrites. It's ridiculous--

EVERETT
Mom, please. She doesn't feel comfortable.

Sybil rolls her eyes. She raises her voice for the benefit of those in the kitchen.

SYBIL
Why *should* she feel comfortable? PUTTING AMY OUT OF HER ROOM AND ALL!

AMY (O.S.)
(from the kitchen)
WHAT?!

INT. STONE HOUSE - AMY'S ATTIC BEDROOM - DAY

MEREDITH
I hope I'm not putting any one out.

AMY
(furious)
Me, out. You're putting me out.

Sybil makes the bed while Elizabeth examines the contents of Meredith's open suitcase.

ELIZABETH
Why aren't you sleeping in Everett's room? He's your friend isn't he? Did you have a fight?

MEREDITH
Of course not.

ELIZABETH
Can I try your shoes?

MEREDITH
Amy, I am so sorry...Isn't there someplace else I could--?

Meredith's phone goes off. She unfolds it and holds that "wait a sec." finger up to Amy.

MEREDITH (CONT'D)
This is Meredith.

Meredith turns her back on Amy, who drops her jaw incredulously.

MEREDITH (CONT'D)
Oh. Hold on.

Meredith turns back around and indicates her phone.

MEREDITH (CONT'D)
It's my sister.

A beat.

SYBIL
Oh! Well, we'll just be downstairs.

Sybil herds Amy and Elizabeth down the stairs while Meredith waits. Elizabeth clomps along in Meredith's shoes.

AMY
(exiting, to Sybil)
You saw it, right? That thing with the finger?!

Once the coast is clear, Meredith returns to the phone.

MEREDITH
They hate me.
(a beat)
*Yes*, I'm being myself!

INT. STONE HOUSE - KITCHEN - DAY

Sybil and Amy enter, trailed by Elizabeth.

SUSANNAH
Elizabeth, where did you get those shoes?

ELIZABETH
She said I could!

SYBIL
(listing on her fingers)
Everett's in his room. Meredith's got yours. Thad and Patrick are at the Inn. Susannah and the kids are in Susannah's old room--

SUSANNAH
Amy, you want to sleep with me?

AMY
Gross, you're pregnant. I'll take the couch. Where's Dad?

PATRICK
I think he's down in the darkroom.

Amy goes out the other kitchen door.

Sybil rubs Susannah's shoulder and kisses her head.

SUSANNAH
Oh, I'm so used to it. She's just like Elizabeth; crazy for all the boys in the family. I get it all the time.

SYBIL
(calling after Amy)
If Ben doesn't show up you can have his and Thad's room until tomorrow!

Amy comes back to the kitchen.

AMY
(smiling hugely)
Ben! Oh, my god! You know who's just going to hate her *the most*?

INT. STONE HOUSE - EVERETT'S BEDROOM - DAY

Everett closes a drawer in his bureau, the top of which is lined with a staggering number of trophies.

A mirror hangs over the bureau, multiplying the trophies and reflecting the bounce of light off their silver and gold plating. Medals on ribbons hang from the edges of the mirror.

Everett picks up a plaque, examining its inscription: "Everett Stone, Most Valuable Player of the Year, 1984."

Silently, Meredith enters and slips her arms through Everett's from behind.

MEREDITH
What did you win?

Everett places the plaque deep at the back of the dresser.

EVERETT
Third place in a tractor pull.

MEREDITH
Don't be--

EVERETT
I'm not mad.

Meredith picks up a trophy topped by a gold soccer player.

MEREDITH
What's this one for?

EVERETT
That one? I did better. Second place in a taffy pull.

MEREDITH
(laughing)
That's not what it says.

She picks up another.

MEREDITH (CONT'D)
Try this one, and don't be so modest.

EVERETT
Well, that's *just* what that's for. Modesty. Most modest player, girl's volley ball. State champion.

MEREDITH
(whispering, conspiratorially)
Look at them.

Everett looks in the mirror over the dresser and finds Meredith looking back at him in the glass.

MEREDITH (CONT'D)
Just look at them.

Watching herself in the mirror, Meredith kisses his neck.

Everett stares back at himself.

MEREDITH (CONT'D)
(nuzzling)
Everett?

EVERETT
Mmm?

MEREDITH
You love me, don't you?

BEN (O.S.)
Hello!? Hey! Is anybody home?!

Sam starts barking.

INT. STONE HOUSE - FRONT HALL - DAY

AMY
Oh, my god! Wait until you meet her!

Amy has both hands locked on BEN STONE'S wrist, pulling on his arm, dragging him from the front door toward the stairs.

In his early thirties, Ben is closest in age to Amy, and shares their family's easy good looks. He wears a heavy Peruvian sweater, Army pants, technically elaborate sandals with socks, and an extremely feminine silk scarf. He drops his duffle bag in the hall.

BEN
Meet who?

AMY
Meredith!

Sybil enters from the kitchen, her voice proceeding her.

SYBIL
NO SMOKING POT IN THE HOUSE!! Do you hear me? No pot in the house. I mean it this time!

BEN
Merry Christmas, Mom.

SYBIL
And Christmas is not going to be clothing-optional this year! We've got company.

Elizabeth comes running after Sybil. She stumbles in Meredith's shoes, snapping off one of the heels, and lands in Ben's arms.

BEN
Goodness! Britney, you must be more careful. Think of your fans.

EVERETT
(from the top of the stairs)
Ben!

BEN
Everett!

Ben puts Elizabeth down and looks up to see Everett.

BEN (CONT'D)
Everett in a tie!

As Everett descends the stairs, Meredith is revealed.

Ben's face goes slack with wonder.

Everett seizes Ben in a bear hug.

EVERETT
Ben, I want you to meet Meredith!

Ben appears too stunned to speak.

Meredith cautiously offers her hand. Ben just keeps staring.

MEREDITH
Hi, I'm Meredith.

Sybil and Amy and Elizabeth all look at Ben as though he were a stranger.

Amy swats Ben's head.

AMY
Hey!

SUSANNAH (O.S.)
(from the kitchen)
I can't get up!

INT. STONE HOUSE - KITCHEN - DAY

Susannah is set up at the kitchen table stringing cranberries and popcorn garland.

Everyone enters. Ben kisses Susannah.

BEN
Hi, Mommy.

SUSANNAH
Oh, baby!

BEN
Where's your husband?

SUSANNAH
What husband?
(a beat, joking)
Oh! That one. He'll be here Christmas.

Ben goes over and seizes Thad and Patrick in an embrace at the counter, kissing them both.

PATRICK
"Dolomite."

BEN
"Warden."

PATRICK
(indicating Thad)
"Dolomite, you know Queen Bee."

BEN
(to Thad)
"Queen Bee."

THAD
"Dolomite, while you was in prison, I taught all your bitches the kung-fu."

SUSANNAH
Hey!

Susannah covers Elizabeth's ears. Elizabeth holds Meredith's broken shoes.

ELIZABETH
Hey!

BEN
Where's Dad? Hey, where's Andrew?

SYBIL
They joined the circus.

EVERETT
A *better* circus.

PATRICK
Less clowns.

Meredith gently takes her shoes from Elizabeth.

SUSANNAH
Sorry. We might have some glue.

MEREDITH
I think I'll just go find another pair.

Meredith heads for the back stairs, examining her shoes.

BEN
Now don't dilly-dally any there, pretty lady!

Meredith stops at the bottom of the stairs. She looks at Ben with consternation.

BEN (CONT'D)
(sweetly, smiling)
We're going to be talking about you.

From behind, Sam sticks his nose in Meredith's ass.

Meredith jumps and rushes up the stairs, mortified.

BEN (CONT'D)
You hurry back!

Ben sits at the table, opposite Susannah, and pulls Thad down into his lap. He hugs Thad and grabs Everett's arm, pulling him in conspiratorially.

BEN (CONT'D)
Tell me you don't remember Ms. Lewin--!

SYBIL
Your Second Grade teacher? The one without lips?

BEN
Man, I was so *into* her!

AMY
You. Are a freak.

BEN
She is so sweet. Incredible!

Everett grins, adjusting the knot of his tie in a preening, Oliver Hardy fashion.

EVERETT
I thank you, Sir.

BEN
(to Susannah)
Isn't she incredible?

SUSANNAH
Yes. It would appear that she is incredible.

BEN
Everett, where did you--?

INT. EVERETT'S CAR - NIGHT - MOVING

MEREDITH
Hong Kong! Last Spring.

Everett and Meredith occupy the front seat. Amy and Thad sit in the back, with Ben wedged between them.

MEREDITH (CONT'D)
Actually, over on Kowloon side, not Hong Kong island, although we were both *staying* over there, on Hong Kong island that is. Everett at the Grand Hyatt. I was at the Mandarin.

Only Ben is really listening, and he is rapt. Behind his back, Amy and Thad make faces. Amy occasionally signs parts of Meredith's monologue, but mostly she just makes a duck-bill with her hand, opening and closing it: Yak, yak, yak.

Everett keeps an eye on Amy and Thad in the rearview mirror.

MEREDITH (CONT'D)
But, we were *introduced* in the lobby of the Peninsula hotel.

Meredith cranes around to the back, for Thad's benefit.

MEREDITH (CONT'D)
THAT'S ON KOWLOON SIDE!

AMY
He's not deaf, you know.

Thad laughs.

Meredith doesn't seem to hear.

MEREDITH
Anyway, I was there for this post-post unification conference. And I had a meeting over at the Peninsula.
(MORE)

MEREDITH (CONT'D)
So there I am, crossing the lobby, and who do I see but Rachel Graham!

AMY
Who?

BEN
What were you wearing?

EXT. PIZZA PARLOR - NIGHT - ESTABLISHING

INT. PIZZA PARLOR - NIGHT

Everyone waits for the pizzas to be boxed as Meredith continues, without breath.

The novelty has worn off for Amy and Thad, who lean glumly against the counter, suffering the barrage that is her story.

MEREDITH
It had been what, ten years? More? God, almost sixteen! Andover. So there I am, catching up with Rachel, and here comes Everett. Of course, I didn't know him, but Rachel did. They'd gotten their Masters together. And you hadn't seen each other in, what was it, at least eight years!
(deep breath)
Anyway, the point is, Everett was lost. Remember?

Everett is busy paying the cashier.

EVERETT
What?

MEREDITH
How you were lost?

EVERETT
I'm pretty sure I was only pretending--

MEREDITH
He was on his way to take some boat out to, what was it?

INT. STONE HOUSE - LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

The whole family is spread out, with pizza boxes and paper plates.

EVERETT
Lantau. Lantau Island.

MEREDITH
Right. Some pilgrimage he'd gotten into his head. On his way to see some Buddha statue at some monastery.

EVERETT
In fact, it's one of the world's largest metal Buddhas. Over three stories tall. You can stay at this monastery. Actually share meals with the monks. But they've taken a vow of silence--

AMY
(pointedly)
A vow of what?

Everett makes a comically savage face at Amy.

AMY (CONT'D)
Your tie's crooked.

KELLY
That sounds incredible. How long were you there?

MEREDITH
Well, he never made it, of course.

Meredith delicately picks slices of pepperoni off the pizza she's hardly eating. Sam won't let her alone. He keeps going for her plate.

MEREDITH (CONT'D)
One thing led to another. Rachel suggested lunch. And we got to talking--

SUSANNAH
Everett, what did you talk about?

EVERETT
(glaring)
I don't remember.

Amy reaches over and tries to loosen Everett's tie.

AMY
That looks a little tight.

EVERETT
(slapping Amy away)
It's fine!

SYBIL
Why don't you just take that damn thing off already?!

MEREDITH
(blithely, oblivious)
OH, Please! Of course, you remember! See, Everett was there on business with Steve. Working out their position for the IPO this spring. Well, of course that's what I do. Part of it, at any rate. You know, the Asian market. They were taking this document around--who had put that together for you, again?

EVERETT
(to Thad)
You remember Randy Jackson.

THAD
God, I haven't heard from him in ages. How's he doing?

MEREDITH
Should be drummed out of business. If he had a business. Which he doesn't. I still can't believe you paid him for that.

EVERETT
He's a friend.

MEREDITH
So, that's really how we spent our first night together! Going over that hideous report, line by line. I just made some suggestions, showed Everett what needed to be done--

PATRICK
And you've been showing him ever since--

Meredith, smiling affectionately, reaches out with a proprietary hand, and plucks a non-existent bit of lint from Everett's shoulder.

MEREDITH
I was just lucky. In the right place at the right time.

EVERETT
Meredith was a real help.

SYBIL
Well!

Sybil gets up and begins to collect paper plates.

MEREDITH
Oh, let me help you.

SYBIL
NO! I mean, please, don't trouble yourself. You're our guest.

MEREDITH
Then, maybe I'll just wash my hands.

Sybil leaves for the kitchen and Everett follows her.

As Meredith leaves for the ground floor bathroom, everyone falls over where they sit.

BEN
She is fantastic!

Thad throws a pizza crust at Ben.

PATRICK
I just want to know what she's on.

AMY
Do you think the ability to induce coma could be considered a true Superpower?

BEN
You, stop being Miss Nasty. You want to go after someone, go after Ev.

SUSANNAH
Oh, I know! Why is he being so weird?

KELLY
They do seem an unlikely pair.

SUSANNAH
Really, Dad? Ya think?

INT. STONE HOUSE - KITCHEN - NIGHT

Everett follows Sybil in.

EVERETT
Mom, I want to talk to you.

SYBIL
Oh, yes! I'm sure you do.

EVERETT
I have something I want to ask you.

SYBIL
Yes, I thought that might be it. Not now.

INT. STONE HOUSE - KELLY'S STUDY - NIGHT

SUSANNAH
Everyone be quiet! This is my favorite part.

Everyone, but Sybil and Kelly, is sprawled in front of the television set on which **The Sound of Music** plays with closed captions. Andrew is conked out on the floor.

Even next to Everett, Meredith seems to sit at a remove.

On the television, Maria and the Captain dance in the garden.

Maria stops dancing and steps away from the Captain.

SUSANNAH (CONT'D)
(as Maria)
"I don't remember any more."

PATRICK
(as Brigitta)
"Your face is all red."

SUSANNAH AND AMY
(as Maria)
"Is it?"

In unison, the entire group, but for Meredith and Elizabeth, mimic Maria as she raises both hands to conceal her blushing.

ALL (BUT MEREDITH AND ELIZABETH)
(as Maria)
"I don't suppose I'm used to dancing."

The Baroness approaches Maria and the Captain.

BEN
(as the Baroness, archly)
"That was beautifully done. What a lovely couple you make."

Everyone sneers at the Baroness.

AMY
Look how thin she is! Like the Crypt-Keeper.
(catching Meredith's eye)
Not that there's anything wrong with that.

Everett reaches for Meredith's arm, but she moves it.

THAD
I never believe that dress.

ELIZABETH
I think she's pretty.

SUSANNAH
How did I ever get such a girly-girl?

Maria and the children leave the garden. The Captain and the Baroness enter the house.

BEN
(as the Baroness)
"All that needless worrying, Georg. You thought you wouldn't find a friend at the party."

EVERETT
(as the Captain)
"A little chilly out tonight, isn't it?"

BEN
(as the Baroness)
"Oh, I don't know. Seemed rather warm to me."

Everyone but Meredith and Elizabeth laugh and sneer at the Baroness.

ELIZABETH
Why do you all keep doing that?

AMY
Because the Baroness is so mean.

ELIZABETH
Why is she so mean?

AMY
Because she's going to marry the Captain. Then she's packing those kids off to a work camp.
(MORE)

AMY (CONT'D)
(turning)
Isn't that right, Meredith?

EVERETT
Amy!

Abruptly, Meredith stands.

MEREDITH
Good night. I think I'm going to bed.

BEN
Aw, come on, Meredith!

MEREDITH
I think the Baroness and I have had enough for one day.

Meredith heads out of the room, for the stairs in the hall.

EVERETT
Meredith, wait--

Everett follows Meredith, chucking a pillow at Amy, as he exits.

EVERETT (CONT'D)
You guys are such assholes.

SUSANNAH
(to Amy)
You always have to take it too far.

Ben hauls Amy off the couch and puts her in a head lock.

AMY
No, don't!!

BEN
Why do you have to be such a meanie?

INT. STONE HOUSE - AMY'S ATTIC BEDROOM - NIGHT

Meredith struggles to hang her clothes in Amy's over-stuffed closet as Everett comes up the stairs.

MEREDITH
What did I ever do to her?

EVERETT
Well, you are staying in her room.

MEREDITH
Yeah. Some help you were in that department. Thanks. The natives would never *dream* of letting their god sleep on a couch. And now they get to blame me--

EVERETT
(laughs)
Meredith, come on. You're being--

MEREDITH
I'm not a completely ridiculous person, Everett. I can see you beginning to look at me like they do.

EVERETT
That's not true--

MEREDITH
Isn't it? You're telling me you're not wondering why you brought me here? That you're not having doubts?

EVERETT
Absolutely not.

MEREDITH
You don't wish I were different?

He thinks.

EVERETT
Different, how?

Meredith stops in stunned silence, mouth agape.

EVERETT (CONT'D)
That was a joke! *A joke!*

MEREDITH
(quietly)
I wouldn't want you just because you were a good guy who got caught up in something and then couldn't find the brake.

EVERETT
(seductively)
Hey, I'm not a good guy.

Meredith looks at Everett and smiles almost sadly.

MEREDITH
Yeah. You are.

INT. STONE HOUSE - KELLY'S STUDY - NIGHT

**The Sound of Music** continues on television.

ELIZABETH
Are Everett and Meredith going to get married?

AMY
Not if we have anything to say about it.

ELIZABETH
Do you live with Grandma and Grandpa?

AMY
You know I live in Boston, like you and Thad and Patrick.

ELIZABETH
Then why are you always here? Don't you like your house?

SUSANNAH
Elizabeth...

AMY
Of course, I do.

ELIZABETH
But, then why are you always *here*? Don't you have any friends?

BEN
Yeah, Amy, what's up with that?

ELIZABETH
Why aren't you married?

INT. STONE HOUSE - SYBIL AND KELLY'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

Sybil sits in bed with a book, while Kelly undresses.

SYBIL
He's coming for that ring. That's what he wants to talk to me about. He intends to give that girl my mother's wedding ring.

KELLY
What I don't understand is what he sees in her.

SYBIL
(laughing)
I knew it! I was on to you!

KELLY
No, I don't mean that. She is an attractive woman. She's intelligent. Obviously successful. She's better mannered than any of us--

SYBIL
Oh, give me a break. You stick a silver spoon up a monkey's ass, it's bound to say "please" and "thank you." That's no trick.

KELLY
She's a fine woman. It's just that she doesn't know herself very well.

SYBIL
Well you can relax, because I know her.

KELLY
What is troubling to me is that, if she doesn't know herself very well, I'm afraid that means Everett may not know himself at all.

SYBIL
Thank you, professor. She has him fooled.

KELLY
Sybil, stop making her out to be so conniving. Really. I don't think she has him *fooled*. Not in any lasting way. But, it is upsetting to think he may have himself fooled.

There is a knock at the door.

SYBIL
Go away!

Amy opens the door. She carries a pillow, fighting tears.

KELLY
What's wrong, honey?

AMY
Can I start out with you guys?

EXT. AMHERST TOWNSHIP - DAWN

The sun breaks over the distant mountains, striking the sides of the brick academic buildings on campus, Johnson Chapel, and the town hall.

EXT. STONE HOUSE - DAWN

The pink dawn is reflected in the house's dark windows.

From inside, comes the loud pounding of footsteps.

INT. STONE HOUSE - AMY'S ATTIC BEDROOM - DAWN

The sound of the footsteps grows louder as they mount the stairs to Amy's room.

Meredith stirs in bed.

Andrew throws himself up the last step and slaps the floor. Meredith sits bolt upright, looking at Andrew.

ANDREW
Sorry.

MEREDITH
What are you doing?

ANDREW
Hiding from Grandma.

INT. STONE HOUSE - KITCHEN - DAY

Sybil doesn't turn when Meredith enters.

SYBIL
You're up early. Sleep all right?

MEREDITH
He's hiding.

SYBIL
Everett's hiding?

MEREDITH
Andrew.

SYBIL
I need coffee first.

Amy enters from the other kitchen entrance wearing a sweatshirt over a nightgown. She rubs her arms. Her hair is a chaotic tangle. She looks exhausted.

AMY
It's freezing. Is there coffee?

SYBIL
Coming up.

Amy heads for the clothes dryer in the back hall. She peels off her sweatshirt and throws it in the machine. She pushes a button and the old appliance rumbles to life.

MEREDITH
Good morning, Amy.

Amy smiles thinly at Meredith and crosses to the table, dropping into a chair and turning her attention to a crossword puzzle.

Sybil and Meredith watch the coffee maker.

Sybil goes to the table and picks up a stack of Christmas cards and a letter opener, bringing them to the counter.

SYBIL
Oh, Amy, I meant to tell you, we got a card from the Stevensons the other day.
(playing innocent)
You remember Brad, don't you?

AMY
Very funny.

SYBIL
Braaad. Brad. Brad Stevenson. Still in town. Still available.

Amy looks up from the puzzle and does an exaggerated pantomime of laughing her head off, without making a sound. She turns back to the puzzle.

Sybil lines up three mugs on the counter.

SYBIL (CONT'D)
Brad popped Amy's cherry.

AMY
Mom!

SYBIL
I'm sorry, dear. Is that not accurate?
(to Meredith)
Poor boy's still holding out for her. Guess he got a taste of something he liked--

AMY
Okay, Mom!

Sybil takes one of the mugs and sticks it under the drip hole of the coffee maker, alternating mugs until they're all full.

SYBIL
Milk's in the fridge, if you need it. I better Go Find THAT ANDREW! I WONDER WHERE HE COULD BE!

Sybil exits up the back stairs.

Meredith goes to the fridge.

MEREDITH
Amy, you take milk?

AMY
I'll do it.

Amy comes over to the counter and she and Meredith prepare their coffees in silence.

Meredith clears her throat.

MEREDITH
I'm really sorry you had to sleep on the couch last night. Maybe we can take turns--

AMY
Don't sweat it.

Amy goes to the dryer and extracts her sweatshirt.

Meredith takes a deep breath, as if summoning courage. She clears her throat again.

MEREDITH
I wish you'd give me a chance. Whatever it is that I did wrong--

AMY
I said, don't sweat it.

Amy pulls on the warm sweatshirt.

MEREDITH
I don't know what I did to you. I really don't. But you know, I don't care whether you like me or not.

A slow grin of victory spreads across Amy's face.

AMY
Oh, of course you do.

Amy mounts the back stairs, leaving Meredith alone.

INT. STONE HOUSE - KELLY'S STUDY - DAY

The whole family, but for Ben, watches through the window as Everett opens the trunk of his car for Meredith.

PATRICK
She's going to the Inn?

THAD
What excuse did she give?

SUSANNAH
Something about having a bad back.

Outside, using brute strength, Meredith hoists her heavy suitcase into the trunk.

AMY
Ecgh-Mm.

SUSANNAH
Said she could get them to put a board under her mattress at the Inn.

SYBIL
She say anything about them getting a winch to pull the needle out of her ass?

INT. STONE HOUSE - FRONT HALL - DAY

Just outside Kelly's study, Ben, wearing oddly skimpy briefs and a T-shirt that doesn't quite reach his waist, sets a mug of coffee down on a bench.

He sits and begins to pull on a pair of snow boots.

INT. KELLY'S STUDY - DAY

Outside, Everett turns toward the house, looking directly toward this window and its clustered spectators.

PATRICK
Busted!

SYBIL
Here he comes!

INT. STONE HOUSE - FRONT HALL - DAY

The family races out of Kelly's study, passing Ben as they run for the kitchen.

A beat.

Everett blasts through the front door and marches past Ben towards the kitchen.

EVERETT
Morning.

BEN
Morning.

Ben picks up the mug of coffee and heads out the front door.

INT. STONE HOUSE - KITCHEN - DAY

Everett enters to find everyone engrossed in various, suddenly critical tasks.

EVERETT
Excuse me, family.

SYBIL
Oh, Everett!

EVERETT
I just want to know who said something to her.

SYBIL
To whom, dear?

EVERETT
Meredith is checking into the Inn.

SYBIL
Yes, I'd heard something about that--

EVERETT
And now her sister, Julie, is coming to join her. Her sister, Julie, whom I have never met, is giving up Christmas with her own parents in order to be by Meredith's side--

AMY
Come on! Now she's called her sister?

Everett violently slams an empty chair into the table, slopping coffee from mugs and creating a cascade of Christmas cards.

EVERETT
*That's it!*

Everybody freezes, silenced.

EVERETT (CONT'D)
Look, I knew it wouldn't be easy. I figured you'd all give her a hard time, have your little laugh, and then back off. For me. Now, if the problem is that somebody's got an issue with me...

Everett scans his family's shocked faces.

EVERETT (CONT'D)
Okay. Then, Meredith hunting season is now officially over. You can all pull your teeth out of her, and remind yourselves that whatever you think she is, Meredith's someone that means something to me. And you better start getting used to the idea.

KELLY
Everett--

EVERETT
I expected more at least of you.

EXT. STONE HOUSE - DRIVEWAY - DAY

Meredith unrolls the passenger window for Ben to hand her the mug of coffee.

BEN
Coffee's not very good at the Inn.

Taking the mug, Meredith does her best not to look at Ben's body, barely concealed by the briefs and frayed T-shirt.

MEREDITH
Thank you.

BEN
You're coming back, aren't you? You'll come back?

MEREDITH
I'm just checking in.

BEN
Good. Good.

Meredith takes a sip of coffee and gestures with the mug.

MEREDITH
Well. Thanks.

BEN
I had a dream about you last night.

MEREDITH
What?

BEN
I did. I had a dream about you.

They regard each other for a beat.

MEREDITH
(cautiously)
What was I doing?

BEN
(laughing)
Well...

EVERETT
Let's go.

Everett arrives at the car. He goes for the driver's side.

EVERETT (CONT'D)
Ben, are you coming?

BEN
Don't forget to bring the mug back, it's Sybil's favorite. She'll kill you.

INT. STONE HOUSE - KITCHEN - DAY

Patrick straightens up the table.

PATRICK
Well, I can't wait to meet the sister, sister.

SUSANNAH
I can't believe she called her sister.

Ben enters.

SYBIL
I saw you give her my mug!

THAD
Ben, is that men's underwear?

KELLY
Okay! A call to order!

INT. STONE HOUSE - LIVING ROOM - DAY

Everyone is gathered, except for Everett and Meredith, and Andrew and Elizabeth.

KELLY
So, we're in agreement, then?

Everyone nods halfheartedly.

KELLY (CONT'D)
We're going to be on our best behavior from now on. Right, Amy?

AMY
Why do you keep singling me out?

KELLY
We will welcome Meredith back, without judgement, and her sister, Julie. We will welcome them into our home with open arms. And no one, I repeat, no one is to let on about this consensus.

SYBIL
Such a brown-noser.

KELLY
Sybil, sweetheart, my gentle angel, I'm merely suggesting that the more Everett feels the need to defend her, the more entrenched he may become, increasingly determined to move forward, not with a clear head, but with a mind and will bent on showing us up.

SYBIL
(checking everyone else)
Got that?

THAD
This Christmas sucks!

BEN
I'd like to say something, if I may.

SYBIL
Well, you can forget it!

AMY
Let's just vote Ben off the island.

BEN
I'm ashamed of all of you.

SUSANNAH
Like that's news.

SYBIL
He's going to ask me for that ring. I know it.

BEN
He can't marry her.

AMY
Um. DUH!

BEN
They don't even love each other.

SYBIL
You just watch. He's going to ask for that ring.

SUSANNAH
Mom, enough about the ring.

INT. STONE HOUSE - KELLY'S STUDY - DAY

SYBIL
What ring?

Everett closes the door for privacy and comes to kneel in front of Sybil, perched on the edge of the couch.

EVERETT
Grandma's wedding ring?

SYBIL
Oh.

EVERETT
Mom, this is the woman I'm going to marry.

SYBIL
We're talking about Meredith, right?

EVERETT
Mom. Remember when I was dating Becket Royce? And you said to me--

SYBIL
Whatever happened to Becket? Such a sweet girl--

EVERETT
And you said that when I met the woman who was to be my wife, I should come to you. I should come to you, because you wanted that woman to wear your mother's wedding ring. Well, I have met that woman. And I am asking you for the ring you promised me. I want to give it to Meredith tomorrow. On Christmas.

Everett has a hold of Sybil's hand. She just looks at it for a beat.

SYBIL
No.

EVERETT
Mom!

SYBIL
No. I'm sorry. I am. But, no. That woman--

EVERETT
(standing, exasperated)
That woman!

SYBIL
*Meredith*. I'm not afraid to say her name, Mr. Smartguy. Meredith is not going to have your grandmother's ring.

EVERETT
You promised!

SYBIL
Tough shit.
(more gently)
Look, I know you're disappointed, but think how I feel.

Everett, arms folded, fixes Sybil with an acid smile.

EVERETT
You're a peach.

INT. STONE HOUSE - KITCHEN - DAY

SYBIL
Goddamnit! Who had the last of the coffee and didn't make more? There is supposed to be a pot here, and it is supposed to remain full! I want coffee available to me at all times. Those are the rules! Everyone knows them!

Sybil enters through the door nearest the table. Behind her, Meredith and Patrick work at the counter.

MEREDITH
(trembling)
I was just washing the pot. I'm sorry.

PATRICK
It's okay. She's just a mean old witch! Let me make it.

Patrick takes a bag of decaf out of the freezer and holds a finger up to his lips for Meredith's benefit; their secret.

SYBIL
(not looking)
And I don't want decaf!

PATRICK
No! None of that decaf for a nasty old thing like you.

SYBIL
What is all this *crap* on my desk?!

PATRICK
Hey! Sybil! Cool it. All right? Meredith's cooking.

MEREDITH
Let me get these pans out of your way. I'm sorry. I'm so sorry.

Patrick comes to help Meredith clear everything away.

PATRICK
(to Sybil, pointedly)
Meredith's making breakfast.

MEREDITH
For tomorrow. Christmas morning. Strada. It's a Morton family tradition. I know that you and Patrick have the dinner all planned out, but I wanted to contribute something. And my sister's coming. I just wanted to be able to do something for everyone.

Sybil looks to Patrick, who narrows his eyes at her, then she sits.

SYBIL
Everything all right at the Inn?

MEREDITH
Yes. Thank you.

SYBIL
Thank you for bringing my mug back.

EXT. JEWELRY STORE - ESTABLISHING - DAY

INT. JEWELRY STORE - DAY

MRS. AUSTEN, an attractive woman in her fifties, stands behind a counter, facing Everett and Thad.

MRS. AUSTEN
Going to be a lot of broken hearts in this town...

EVERETT
What do you think about this one?

Everett holds up a ring for Thad to examine.

MRS. AUSTEN
That's a beautiful choice. Platinum setting. I believe that's a four karat stone.

EVERETT
Is that good?

Mrs. Austen smiles knowingly.

EVERETT (CONT'D)
Thad, what do you think? Is it big enough?

MRS. AUSTEN
Let me look up the specifics on that one...

Thad puts his hand on Everett's arm.

EVERETT
You see a different one?

THAD
Don't do it.

EVERETT
What?

THAD
Marry her, Everett. Please don't marry her.

EVERETT
Thad--
(decisive)
I am. Getting. Married.

THAD
Is this...is this about Mom?

Everett looks at the ring.

EVERETT
(quietly)
Of course, this is about Mom.

Mrs. Austen returns to the counter with a binder.

MRS. AUSTEN
Here we are!

INT. STONE HOUSE - KITCHEN

Meredith and Patrick are in the midst of cooking when Susannah pokes her head in.

SUSANNAH
Where's Mom?

MEREDITH
Hi, Susannah!

Susannah waves at Meredith who goes back to her recipe.

PATRICK
She's taking a nap.

Patrick and Susannah exchange a look.

Meredith continues whipping eggs in a bowl, oblivious.

INT. STONE HOUSE - UPSTAIRS HALLWAY - DAY

Susannah knocks on the door. There is no answer.

INT. STONE HOUSE - KELLY AND SYBIL'S BEDROOM - DAY

Quietly, Susannah opens the door and finds Sybil sleeping on her bed.

Susannah slips out of her shoes and gently lays down, draping an arm around Sybil, spooning her mother.

A beat.

Sybil opens her eyes but doesn't turn.

They lay like this for a moment, silently.

Sybil's eyes narrow and she turns to face Susannah, raising herself up on an elbow.

SYBIL
All right. Who else knows?

EXT. PRATT ATHLETIC FIELD - DAY

Ben cups his hands around a match flame, lighting a joint.

He takes a deep drag, holds it, exhales, and passes the joint to Kelly.

They sit high up on weathered wooden bleachers, overlooking the football field, empty but for Sam who runs in circles.

BEN
It's worse this time. Isn't it?

Kelly takes a drag from the joint. Holds it. Passes the joint to Ben.

KELLY
What do you mean?

BEN
*Mom*, Dad. I mean Mom.

Kelly lets out the smoke in a big exhale. He doesn't speak.

He looks down and plays with Sam's leash in his hands.

KELLY
It's not good.

Ben crosses his legs, one over the knee of the other, and puts his arm around Kelly. He offers Kelly the joint.

Kelly doesn't take it.

KELLY (CONT'D)
She wanted to wait until after Christmas. To tell you kids.

Ben looks into the distance.

KELLY (CONT'D)
We only found out two weeks ago.

Ben pulls Kelly closer. He kisses Kelly's face.

They sit for a beat.

Kelly rubs at his eyes and then turns to Ben, who is silently weeping.

KELLY (CONT'D)
Oh, Ben...I know...

BEN
I'm in love, Dad. I'm in love. God. I'm just sick in love.

A beat of confusion for Kelly.

KELLY
With whom?

INT. STONE HOUSE - KITCHEN - NIGHT

Meredith pours an egg batter into two large low cooking trays. Patrick and Sybil observe her work.

MEREDITH
Now, you just put the tomatoes and mushrooms and bread on top of this and then let them sit in the fridge overnight. They just need to bake a bit tomorrow morning.

PATRICK
I thought Everett's allergic to mushrooms.

MEREDITH
He is?

The back door opens and Sam runs in, followed by Ben and Kelly.

SYBIL
Didn't you know that?

Ben goes over to Sybil and encircles her in his arms. She hugs him and releases him, but he doesn't let go. He just keeps hanging onto her.

Sybil laughs and pats Ben's arms.

SYBIL (CONT'D)
Okay, honey.

BEN
(muffled in Sybil's neck)
I love you, Mom.

Sybil shoots an accusing glance at Kelly, who looks away.

Amy enters.

AMY
What's going on? What's wrong?

Ben squeezes Sybil harder a last time and then lets go.

SYBIL
You and Daddy have fun getting stoned?

Ben rubs his eyes and pastes on a big grin, clapping his hands together.

BEN
Okay! How can I make myself of service? Meredith, what can I do to make you happy?

Kelly watches Ben approach Meredith.

MEREDITH
I think I'm all set. Everett had some errands to run and then he and Thad were going to meet Julie's bus.

EXT. AMHERST TOWN COMMON - BUS STOP - NIGHT

Everett checks his watch.

He and Thad stand on the edge of the Common, at the bus stop, as a Peter Pan coach bus turns the far corner onto Pleasant Street.

All the trees on the Common are spun with white lights. Wreaths hang on the lamp posts.

The bus pulls up and the doors open.

THAD
What does she look like?

EVERETT
I only saw a picture of her once.

Everett walks along the length of the bus, straining to see inside, as people disembark.

Finally, JULIE MORTON appears, framed by the bus's door. She is, simply, beautiful. Late twenties. Her hair is lighter than Meredith's.

Everett and Julie's eyes land on each other at the same instant, causing Julie to stumble slightly, on the steps of the bus, and Everett's breath to hang before him in cloud, as it is knocked from his chest.

THAD
Is that her?

The DRIVER opens the baggage door on the side of the bus and Julie points at her bag.

JULIE
That one. Thank you.

DRIVER
Merry Christmas!

Julie turns as Everett approaches.

EVERETT
Excuse me...Julie?

JULIE
Are you Everett?

Everett smiles and Julie suddenly sobers.

JULIE (CONT'D)
Where's Meredith?

EVERETT
Back at the house. She's cooking.

JULIE
You're kidding.

Julie picks up her bag at the same instant that Everett reaches for it.

EVERETT
Let me get that.

Julie tries to get the bag from Everett.

JULIE
No. I've got it.
(she softens)
I've got it.

Thad notices whatever this is passing between Everett and Julie.

EVERETT
You want to check into the Inn? It's just across the Common. Then I can take you to the house.

Thad, forgotten, taps Everett on the shoulder.

EVERETT (CONT'D)
Oh, Jesus. I'm sorry. This is my brother--

Thad makes a gesture as though he's about to sign, and then doesn't.

THAD
(speaking)
Hello, Julie.

JULIE
Wait. Wait.
(signing stiffly, thinking)
It's been a while since summer camp. I'm a little rusty.

She begins to sign "Merry Christmas," but Thad demonstrates a simpler way to do this.

JULIE (CONT'D)
You must be Thad.

EXT. AMHERST TOWN COMMON - NIGHT

Everett and Julie walk across the quiet, twinkling Common, Thad following behind, observing.

Julie's bag thumps against her leg as she struggles under its weight.

EVERETT
(reaching for the bag)
Please, let me get that for you.

At his touch, Julie drops the bag on the ground and keeps moving.

JULIE
Thanks.

INT. JEFFREY AMHERST INN - GUEST ROOM - NIGHT

Meredith's open suitcase lays on one of the room's two beds.

Everett lays Julie's suitcase on the other bed.

Thad stands in the doorway, watching.

EVERETT
You want to freshen up.

JULIE
I came to see my sister.

Thad raises his eyebrows at Everett.

INT. STONE HOUSE - KITCHEN - NIGHT

Meredith lays the final touches into her pans of Strada and gingerly carries one of them to the refrigerator, trying not to let the goopey egg batter spill.

Everett and Julie and Thad enter the back hall.

EVERETT (O.S.)
We're here!!

MEREDITH
Oh, my god! Julie! Julie!

INT. STONE HOUSE - BACK HALLWAY - NIGHT

Meredith throws her arms around Julie, squealing.

MEREDITH
Everything's all right, now.

JULIE
What?

MEREDITH
No, no, *really!* It's okay, now. Come meet everyone!

INT. STONE HOUSE - KITCHEN - NIGHT

Thad enters and quick-steps over to Patrick, to whom he signs rapidly and secretively.

PATRICK
(incredulous)
What?!

Patrick, Thad, Sybil and Andrew all stop what they are doing and turn as Meredith brings Julie in with Everett.

Ben, Susannah, Thad, Kelly and Elizabeth come running in.

MEREDITH
Everyone, this is Julie! My baby sister!

SYBIL
(lavishly)
Julie! *Welcome, Julie!* I'm Sybil Stone, Everett's mother. This is my husband, Kelly.

KELLY
Welcome, Julie.

JULIE
(a bit uncertain)
Thank you for having me--

SYBIL
We are *overjoyed*! We were so happy when Meredith said that you could join us! Truly. We are just honored, *honored*, to have you share your Christmas with our family! Ben, take her coat. Can I get you anything?

Ben steps forward to take Julie's coat.

BEN
Ben. Coat check.

SUSANNAH
Hi, I'm Susannah, and this is Elizabeth and Andrew.

Elizabeth looks at Julie's snow boots, visibly unimpressed.

ELIZABETH
Hi.

ANDREW
You want to hide?

PATRICK
Hi, I'm Patrick Thomas.

JULIE
You're with Thad, right?

AMY
God, you're normal. Merry Christmas.

Amy actually hugs Julie.

JULIE
Oh, you must be Amy, the mean sister.

PATRICK
Got that right.

Amy steps back, the smile sliding from her face.

Meredith stands, somewhat forgotten, off to the side, taking it all in.

MEREDITH
(overly cheery)
Why don't we go freshen up?

Sybil steers Kelly into a corner, as Meredith and Julie exit.

SYBIL
(whispers conspiratorially)
God, what a great kid. She's just perfect for Ben!

INT. STONE HOUSE - BACK HALLWAY - BATHROOM - NIGHT

Meredith washes her hands.

JULIE
What do you mean, everything's all right, *now*? What am I doing here?

MEREDITH
(accusing)
Well! They *certainly* like you, don't they?

INT. STONE HOUSE - DINING ROOM - NIGHT

KELLY
Let us hold hands.

Kelly and Sybil are seated at the table's heads. Everett and Meredith sit across from Ben and Julie. Amy sits next to Kelly.

Kelly clears his throat.

Meredith clears her throat in inevitable, unconscious response.

AMY
Ecgh-Mmm!

Kelly squeezes Amy's hand.

AMY (CONT'D)
Oww!

SUSANNAH
Ecgh-Mmm.

PATRICK
Ecgh-Mmm.

KELLY
Dear Lord, we thank you--

AMY
Ecgh-MMM!!

SYBIL
JESUS CHRIST, ALREADY!!

KELLY
Thank you, dear, that was lovely.

Everyone passes plates of food around the table.

KELLY (CONT'D)
So, Julie, tell us a little about what it is that you do.

JULIE
Me?

MEREDITH
Julie works within the artists' grants department at the Rockefeller Foundation.

KELLY
Really? In what capacity?

SYBIL
Ben's a documentary film editor.

JULIE
Oh, in New York?

SYBIL
San Francisco.

Ben signs: I live in Berkeley.

Thad laughs.

SYBIL (CONT'D)
I was not speaking for you!

Ben signs: What do you call it?

Sybil spells something in sign language.

ELIZABETH
Grandma signed the F-word.

SUSANNAH
Thank you, Elizabeth Tattletale.

Sybil shrugs in response to the look she gets from Susannah.

BEN
So, how come you and Everett have never met?

Everett and Julie look at one another.

MEREDITH
Julie's impossible. She's been travelling all year.

INT. STONE HOUSE - DINING ROOM - NIGHT - LATER

Julie signs and speaks with Thad and Patrick.

JULIE
And so your being hearing impaired--

PATRICK
Actually, we were amazed by how little issue the agency had about the hearing thing.

THAD
There were so many more questions about our history as a couple.

PATRICK
And money.

JULIE
This may be personal, but do you have a preference about the child's race?

Meredith blinks.

MEREDITH
Julie.

BEN
I want a little black baby.

JULIE
(embarrassed)
I'm sorry--

BEN
No, I'm sorry.

Patrick and Thad look at each other.

PATRICK
It totally doesn't matter to us.

JULIE
(looking at her hands)
I was just wondering.

THAD
Julie.

Julie looks up.

THAD (CONT'D)
We're just so excited about having this child at all. Really.

Julie smiles, reassured.

Julie glances at Everett, who has been staring.

Thad and Patrick exchange looks.

MEREDITH
I'm sorry. I would sign, but I don't know the language.

PATRICK
It's okay.

MEREDITH
Do you boys believe in Nature or Nurture? I mean, is it at all a concern in terms of bringing a child into your house?

PATRICK
I'm not sure I follow you.

THAD
Why wouldn't we bring it into the house?

MEREDITH
I just mean the gay thing. I mean, there's no irrefutable evidence one way or the other. Yes, they think they've isolated a gene, but what does that mean? They don't know what the gene is for, or what it does.

SUSANNAH
Didn't they determine that it's for window treatments?

MEREDITH
One of the contributing factors to being gay may very well be the environment--

PATRICK
I'm afraid I still don't know where you're going with this.

AMY
I'm afraid I do.

SYBIL
Look at my drapes! They're horrible! There is no way it was this environment.

KELLY
I am certain that everyone in this house believes sexual orientation is the result of a genetic predisposition. Like handedness.

EVERETT
That *and* Mom, who tried to make us all gay.

SYBIL
I did not *try*, Everett. I *hoped*. I hoped you would all be gay. All my boys. Then, you'd never leave me. Sorry girls.

THAD
Sybil asked me when I was eight years old if I was gay.

BEN
She asked all of us that.

EVERETT
Yeah, Thad. Stop pretending you're so *special*.

PATRICK
Ben, are you sure you're not gay?

BEN
Man, I wish!

ANDREW
I'm gay!

SYBIL
Buster, I'm sorry to say, I don't think you are. And I'd know. Trust me.

MEREDITH
You didn't really *hope* for gay children did you?

JULIE
Meredith--

MEREDITH
I don't think anyone wishes for that.

AMY
Ecgh-Mmm!

MEREDITH
No. I'm sorry. Please, don't misunderstand me. It's just, well, what I mean to say is, that no parent would hope for a child to be challenged--

THAD
(knowing full well)
I'm sorry, I didn't hear a word you said.

MEREDITH
(stumbling)
This isn't coming out right. What I mean to say is: Life is hard enough as it is. It seems to me, you wouldn't want it to be any more *difficult* for your child. I mean, Patrick, you must understand what I'm--

THAD
What did she say?

PATRICK
(in Amos & Andy mode)
Boss, we's done been hit twice!

MEREDITH
No! Please! I'm sorry. I didn't--
Really!

EVERETT
(losing patience)
Meredith, why don't you try saying what it is that you *do* mean?

Meredith, stung, blinks at Everett.

KELLY
That's enough.

MEREDITH
I'm so sorry.

KELLY
That's enough.

MEREDITH
I just think any parent wants a *normal*--

SYBIL
Oh, *goddamn* you!

KELLY
Sybil.

SYBIL
Don't you "Sybil" me!

MEREDITH
For the child's sake! Just to make it easier for the child!

KELLY
*That is enough*!

A silent beat.

MEREDITH
I'm so sorry.

KELLY
(with pointed precision)
Then, please have the good sense not to utter another word.

EVERETT
Dad.

KELLY
It's enough, Everett. It's too much.

MEREDITH
Excuse me.

Meredith flees the table in tears.

Everett gets up and goes after her.

Julie sits looking at her hands, seemingly reluctant to meet the eyes of any member of this family.

JULIE
I know how she can seem. She isn't really like--

SYBIL
Hey, you!

Julie's head snaps up, but Sybil isn't talking to her.

SYBIL (CONT'D)
*You!*

Sybil throws her fork the length of the table, where it lands in front of Thad, getting his attention.

In signing, Sybil's hands tremble with as much emotion as her choked voice.

SYBIL (CONT'D)
I love y--
(pauses, breathes)
And you are *more* fucking normal than any other muther-fucker sitting at this table. Except maybe Susannah.

Sybil has a finger pointed at Thad.

SYBIL (CONT'D)
Okay?

Thad nods.

SYBIL (CONT'D)
Okay.

Susannah counts on her fingers.

SUSANNAH
One...two...three...four...

ANDREW
What's a muther-fu--?

Susannah clamps a hand over Andrew's mouth.

SUSANNAH
Thanks, Mom.

SYBIL
I need a fork.

INT. STONE HOUSE BACK HALLWAY - NIGHT

Everett pleads with Meredith through the closed door.

EVERETT
Meredith. Come on. Open up.

MEREDITH
I'll be out in a minute!

EVERETT
Please, let me in.

MEREDITH
Go *away!*

INT. STONE HOUSE - DINING ROOM - NIGHT

Everett returns to the table.

SUSANNAH
Is she okay?

Everett puts his head in his hands.

EVERETT
I don't think she wants to talk to me right now.

They all hear the back door open and slam shut.

EXT. STONE HOUSE - DRIVEWAY - NIGHT

Frantic and hysterical, Meredith gets in Everett's car. She dumps her purse out on the seat and paws for the keys.

She jams the key in the ignition and struggles with the gear shift, blind with tears.

She turns around, to navigate backing out of the drive, and steps on the gas. The car hurtles forward instead, right into a tree at the side of the driveway.

INT. STONE HOUSE - DINING ROOM - NIGHT

Everyone, except Thad, hears the terrific contact of the car and tree.

AMY
(laughing involuntarily)
Oh, no!

EXT. STONE HOUSE - DRIVEWAY - NIGHT

Flailing, Meredith gets the car in reverse and hits the gas.

INT. STONE HOUSE - DINING ROOM - NIGHT

Again, there is the loud impact of the car and another tree.

EVERETT
That's my car.

JULIE
I'm going to go--

BEN
No, let me.

Ben heads out as another crash rattles the panes of the dining room windows.

Everett picks up his plate and heads for the kitchen.

EVERETT
I think I've lost my appetite.

EXT. STONE HOUSE - DRIVEWAY - NIGHT

Everett's car idles in the driveway, the naked bulb of one of its taillights hanging by a wire over the mangled lip of the rear bumper.

Ben comes and knocks on the driver's window, through which he can see Meredith, pinned to her seat by the driver's air bag.

Reluctantly, she rolls down the window.

BEN
(imitating a State Trooper)
There seem to be a problem here, Ma'am?

Meredith rests her head on the air bag, weeping.

BEN (CONT'D)
Move over. I know a place we can go.

INT. STONE HOUSE - KITCHEN - NIGHT

Everett stands at the kitchen phone, listening to the unanswered ringing at the other end.

He hangs up.

INT. STONE HOUSE - KELLY'S STUDY - NIGHT

Everyone is half-watching television.

Julie, quietly reading to Andrew, looks at her watch and looks up as Everett enters.

EVERETT
I'm going to go look for them. It's been two hours.

SUSANNAH
You can take my car.

JULIE
Wait. I'm going with you.

Thad and Patrick raise their eyebrows at each other.

EXT. JEFFREY AMHERST INN - NIGHT - ESTABLISHING

INT. JEFFREY AMHERST INN - NIGHT

Julie comes down the stairs to the lobby, where Everett waits. A college-age RECEPTIONIST reads a book on the other side of the counter.

JULIE
She's not in our room.

EVERETT
(to receptionist)
You're sure there are no messages?

JULIE
Where would he take her?

EXT. O'MALLEY'S BAR - NIGHT - ESTABLISHING

Neon beer signs hang in the window of this townie bar.

INT. O'MALLEY'S BAR - NIGHT

Ben carries two bottles of beer to a table, where he and Meredith are camped out.

Meredith empties a bottle as Ben places another in front of her. Several empty shot glasses litter the table.

MEREDITH
I am *not* a bad person.

BEN
You are a total mess.

MEREDITH
(not listening)
I'm really not.
(now she hears)
I am?

Her face begins to cave in on itself.

BEN
Aw, come on. In the best possible sense. And you know it.

MEREDITH
(crying)
I do?

BEN
You just got completely screwed up somewhere, got into having people think you're this other thing--I'm not sure what it's supposed to be, this Merrill Lynch fem-bot on acid or something.

Ben reaches across the table with a finger and moves a fall of hair away from Meredith's eyes, as she blows her nose.

BEN (CONT'D)
And that's cool.

MEREDITH
(defensively)
I *love* gay people.

EXT. MAIN STREET - NIGHT

Everett and Julie slowly walk the length of shops along the quiet avenue.

JULIE
It was the first totem pole to be raised in that community in a hundred years. And it was just because this guy...this, I guess he was a fisherman, would wander around, you know, from bar to bar, talking about how he had this hole in his heart. That's how he put it. Said he couldn't sleep. Would just lie there in bed, because of this hole in his heart.

Julie glances at Everett, who has been watching her intently. She smiles bashfully.

JULIE (CONT'D)
Anyway. The community got together and, I guess, they found this log...you don't even want to hear this.

Everett reaches out for Julie's arm, stopping her.

EVERETT
No. Tell me.

Julie looks at Everett's hand on her arm. He takes it away and she begins walking again.

JULIE
Well.
(laughs)
They got the guy a log.
(MORE)

JULIE (CONT'D)
He'd never carved a thing before in his life. It took him five years. I flew there for the raising. Just this tiny, tiny island off the coast. The whole town was there.
(pauses)
It was...incredible. You just couldn't look at it without crying.

EVERETT
I'd love to see it.

JULIE
(laughs nervously)
Well, it's there for you.

They've come to a stop in front of a shop window and simply stand, looking at each other, as if trying to read the other's mind.

The moment stretches.

EVERETT
Julie--

JULIE
In Alaska. It's there.

INT. O'MALLEY'S BAR - NIGHT

BRAD STEVENSON and DAVID SILVER enter the bar. Both are wearing their EMT worker uniforms.

Brad Stevenson is a nice enough looking guy. He's Amy's age. Affable, with a generous smile.

David Silver is a little older and more nondescript.

Brad spots Ben as they make their way toward the bar.

BRAD
Ben? Ben Stone?

BEN
Holy crow, Brad!

BRAD
Merry Christmas! You remember David from school.

BEN
Sure. Hey, David! What are you guys doing, working tonight?

BRAD
(searching the bar)
Are you here with Amy?

BEN
No. I'm sorry. This is Meredith. Meredith Morton, Brad Stevenson and David Silver. Meredith's Everett's... Um...Meredith's--

MEREDITH
Hold the phone! *Brad* Stevenson? *Brad Stevenson*! Aren't you the guy--the guy that--*You know*, the guy that popped Amy's cherry?

BRAD
Do I know you?

MEREDITH
This is too good! You gotta let me buy you a drink, Brad. What do you say?
(to David)
You, too. What'd you say your name was? That's what I'm gonna do! I'm gonna buy you boys some beers.

Meredith rifles through her purse, looking for her wallet.

MEREDITH (CONT'D)
Everybody in here. Bartender! I'd like to buy a round for the house!

The bartender looks around the empty bar. It's just Ben and Meredith and Brad and David.

BARTENDER
(indulging her)
Coming right up!

EXT. MAIN STREET - NIGHT

EVERETT
Do you feel like you chose?

JULIE
What do you--?

EVERETT
Chose your life. Said, "this is the thing that I'm going to do.
(MORE)

EVERETT (CONT'D)
These are the things I want." And not necessarily because you were good at this one thing, or because it's what everyone told you you should want, because everyone told you that's who you were...

Julie doesn't answer, but watches Everett as they continue walking along the line of shops.

EVERETT (CONT'D)
I mean, this artists' grants work. How did you know that that's what you'd be passionate about?

JULIE
(laughs)
Who said I was passionate about it?

EVERETT
Don't do that.

Julie looks at Everett.

EVERETT (CONT'D)
Don't joke.

They walk in silence for a beat.

EVERETT (CONT'D)
You know, I keep thinking about this monastery I missed seeing in Hong Kong. Like that's an important thing.

JULIE
Then you should go.

Everett stops walking.

EVERETT
I want to go to Alaska.

Julie turns around to look at him.

EVERETT (CONT'D)
I want to see that totem pole. That thing that felt like a hole in the center of that guy. The thing that he needed to make, just so he could sleep.

They stand, looking at each other.

JULIE
Do you mind if we go back? It's freezing.

INT. O'MALLEY'S BAR - NIGHT

Maxine Nightingale singing "Right Back Where We Started From" kicks in on the jukebox.

MEREDITH
Oh! Fucking *finally*! My song!

Meredith leaps out of the booth and begins dancing. She unties the scarf from her neck and untucks her blouse.

MEREDITH (CONT'D)
Brad! Dance with me!

Brad shoots Ben a helpless look.

BEN
I think you'd better.

Meredith grabs Brad's hands and begins shaking him around.

MEREDITH
So, Brad, listen. You tell me. I don't know what I did to her. I don't know what I said--

BRAD
You know, I haven't seen Amy in over a year, I'm not sure I can help you--

MEREDITH
You haven't seen her in over a year?
(pauses, appraising)
How you gonna get her, Brad? Huh? How you gonna get her like that?

BRAD
I don't even know if she wants to see--

MEREDITH
I like you, Brad. You come over tomorrow. It's Christmas! You come over tomorrow. I'm making breakfast. *I'm* inviting you.

DAVID
You guys want another beer?

MEREDITH
Oh, yes!
(another thought)
Wait!

Meredith stumbles over to the table and leans in low.

MEREDITH (CONT'D)
You know what would be great? You know what would be just, like, the most perfect thing right now? If we could just figure out where to get a little pot!

Ben smiles and looks heavenward.

INT. JEFFREY AMHERST INN - HALLWAY - NIGHT

Julie and Everett stand on opposite sides of the open door to Meredith and Julie's room.

JULIE
Maybe they went back to the house.

EVERETT
Do you want to get some coffee?

JULIE
No.

EVERETT
(not hearing her answer)
I don't know, some coffee or something?

Julie doesn't answer this time.

EVERETT (CONT'D)
I just...I thought...

Julie merely stands, her face pressed against the door, half in, half out of the room.

Everett shifts his weight and moves closer to Julie.

EVERETT (CONT'D)
It's funny--

JULIE
What is?

EVERETT
I want to tell you everything.

JULIE
Everett--

EVERETT
Why does it feel as if I'm only going to get this one chance--?

JULIE
Everett--

EVERETT
Just this one chance. And it really matters. And if I don't get it all out--

JULIE
(abruptly)
I don't--

Everett stops speaking and Julie hesitates.

JULIE (CONT'D)
(gently)
Everett. I don't want to know everything about you.

Everett looks at Julie.

JULIE (CONT'D)
You know? I don't.

They hold for a beat, then Julie slowly closes the door.

JULIE (CONT'D)
Good night.

Everett stands alone in the empty hallway.

INT. JEFFREY AMHERST INN - BATHROOM - NIGHT

Julie washes and dries her face with shaking hands, avoiding her reflection in the mirror.

There is a knock at the door.

INT. JEFFREY AMHERST INN - GUEST ROOM - NIGHT

Despite herself, and doing her best to conceal the smile on her face, Julie rushes to the door and flings it open.

It's Kelly.

JULIE
Mister Stone.

KELLY
Kelly, Julie. Please. Hi. I'm terribly sorry to disturb you. I came to see Meredith.

JULIE
She hasn't shown up yet--

KELLY
I came to apologize. Well, I'd...I'd like very much to apologize to you as well.

JULIE
Would you like to come in?

KELLY
No, no, I don't want to disturb you. Well. Actually, I was on my way to midnight services. You wouldn't..? Would you care to join me?

EXT. AMHERST COLLEGE OBSERVATORY - NIGHT

Everett's battered car is pulled up alongside the hulking domed building, surrounded by forest.

INT. EVERETT'S CAR - NIGHT

Ben, wearing Meredith's scarf on his head, schemata-style, takes a hit off a joint and passes it to Meredith.

Eyes twinkling, Meredith inhales deeply.

MEREDITH
So, what was that dream?

BEN
Which--?

MEREDITH
You told me you had a dream about me, but you didn't finish. You didn't say what I was doing.

Meredith passes the joint back to Ben who takes a hit.

BEN
You were shoveling snow.

MEREDITH
I--What?

BEN
You were just a little girl in a flannel nightgown, shoveling snow on a sunny morning in front of our house.

Meredith watches Ben. There is a shift in her expression that could be clarity of mind, if not sobriety.

BEN (CONT'D)
And I was the snow. I was the snow and everywhere it landed. Everything it covered. And you scooped me up.
(pauses, quietly)
With a big red shovel. You scooped me up.

Ben looks at Meredith. Her eyes shine in the dim light.

MEREDITH
"I turned and looked back upward.
The whole sky was blue;
And the thick flakes floating at a pause
Were but frost knots on an airy gauze
With the sun shining through."

BEN
(sadly)
You've just got them all fooled, don't you?

INT. STONE HOUSE - KELLY'S STUDY - NIGHT

Susannah, Thad, Patrick and Amy watch **Meet Me in St. Louis** and stuff Christmas stockings.

Everett comes to stand in the doorway.

PATRICK
Did you find Meredith?

EVERETT
Is Ben back?

Everyone looks at each other.

SUSANNAH
Sorry.

AMY
Everett--

Everett is already up the stairs.

INT. STONE HOUSE - UPSTAIRS HALLWAY - NIGHT

Everett passes Sybil and Kelly's open bedroom door.

SYBIL
Everett?

Everett backs up and stands in the doorway, not looking at Sybil in bed.

SYBIL (CONT'D)
Honey. I'm really sorry. I--

EVERETT
I'm not really sure I believe that.

Everett heads down the hall.

SYBIL
Everett?

EXT. CHURCH - NIGHT

The old stone church stands on the edge of the town square. Lighted candles line the walkway. Music plays.

INT. CHURCH - NIGHT

The congregation stands, singing "The First Noel" in the flickering candle light.

Kelly looks at Julie singing next to him, as she is overcome with emotion and breaks off from the song.

Kelly finds Julie's hand on the top of the pew in front of them and takes it up in his own.

Julie lets out a sob and Kelly puts his arm around her.

She surrenders and turns into him, resting her head on his chest.

Kelly smooths Julie's hair as he continues singing.

INT. STONE HOUSE - KITCHEN/BACK HALL - NIGHT

Patrick switches off the coffee maker and all but one light.

He turns to Thad, who stands with his coat on in the back hall, smiling, holding Patrick's coat.

Patrick stops when he sees Thad smiling at him.

PATRICK
What?

Thad shrugs and shakes his head slowly, still smiling.

THAD
Nothing.

Patrick comes to get his coat, kissing Thad as he takes it.

The back door opens behind them and Kelly enters.

KELLY
(voice lowered)
Hey. Is everyone asleep?

INT. STONE HOUSE - KELLY'S STUDY - NIGHT

**Meet Me in St. Louis** still plays on the television.

Susannah talks to her husband on her cell phone. Amy is passed out, her head nestled in Susannah's lap, near her pregnant stomach.

Susannah smiles and waves as Kelly comes in and sits on the arm of the couch. He leans over and strokes Amy's hair.

KELLY
She's nice like this, isn't she?

SUSANNAH
John says, hello.

KELLY
Merry Christmas. I'm going up to bed.

Kelly kisses Susannah and gets up and heads for the hall.

SUSANNAH
(on the phone)
Okay, I'm going to go, too. We'll see you tomorrow night. Merry Christmas. I will. Me, too.

She hangs up and folds the phone.

KELLY
You coming up?

SUSANNAH
Are you kidding? This is my favorite part.

Kelly stands under the light of the hallway, looking at his pregnant daughter.

KELLY
Merry Christmas, my Susannah.

SUSANNAH
Merry Christmas, Daddy.

Kelly heads up the stairs and Susannah searches for the television's remote, turning up the volume.

On the television, Judy Garland sings "Have Yourself a Merry Little Christmas" to Margaret O'Brien. This song plays through the next several scenes.

EXT. STONE HOUSE - DRIVEWAY - NIGHT

Patrick starts for the driver's side of their car.

Thad follows and puts his arms around him.

THAD
Let's walk.

Patrick smiles and shrugs. He slams the car door and they start off down the quiet night street.

INT. STONE HOUSE - SYBIL AND KELLY'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

Kelly sits down carefully on the edge of the bed and removes his shoes, rousing Sybil, who has been asleep under a book.

SYBIL
(quietly)
Hi.

Kelly crawls up on the bed, next to Sybil.

KELLY
Hi.

Kelly rests his head on Sybil's chest and she gently rakes her fingers through his hair.

SYBIL
Need a haircut.

A beat.

SYBIL (CONT'D)
You should see how mad he is at me. Just hates me.

Kelly takes Sybil's hand and brings it to his mouth, kissing her fingers.

Kelly raises his head and finds Sybil's mouth.

INT. STONE HOUSE - KELLY'S STUDY - NIGHT

Susannah watches Judy Garland sing. She plucks Kleenex from a box.

EXT. MAIN STREET - NIGHT

Thad and Patrick walk along. They hold hands.

INT. STONE HOUSE - SYBIL AND KELLY'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

Kelly unbuttons the front of Sybil's nightgown, revealing the scars and reconstruction from a double mastectomy, several years old.

He leans in and traces the line of one scar with his fingers and then his lips.

INT. STONE HOUSE - KELLY'S STUDY - NIGHT

Susannah wipes away more tears, resting a hand on her swollen stomach.

Judy Garland continues to sing.

INT. STONE HOUSE - SYBIL AND KELLY'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

Sybil and Kelly make love.

INT. JEFFREY AMHERST INN - GUEST ROOM - NIGHT

Julie sits at the window, looking out at the quiet street.

She sees Thad and Patrick making their way to the Inn.

INT. STONE HOUSE - EVERETT'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

Everett sits on the edge of his bed, in boxers and a T-shirt.

He hits the "send" button on his cell phone, listening to a phone ring and ring and ring on the other end.

In his other hand is an open jewelry box, with the ring he and Thad had looked at earlier in the day.

INT. EVERETT'S CAR - NIGHT

Meredith and Ben are passed out, her head on his chest.

Meredith's cell phone sits in one of the car's cup holders, chirping and chirping and chirping.

EXT. AMHERST COLLEGE OBSERVATORY - NIGHT

Above Everett's car, the night is full of a million twinkling stars and the insistent chirping of Meredith's unanswered phone.

As "Have Yourself a Merry Little Christmas" ends, there is only the sound of the cell phone.

FADE TO BLACK.

EXT. AMHERST TOWNSHIP - DAWN

Church bells peal as the sun crests the distant Holyoke mountain range and suffuses the town Common with the soft orange light of a snowless winter morning.

INT. JEFFREY AMHERST INN - GUEST ROOM - DAWN

Julie comes out of the bathroom, vigorously brushing her teeth.

She looks at Meredith's still-made bed for what must be the eight hundredth time.

There is a soft knock on the door.

JULIE
Meredith, you are in so much--

She opens the door to find Patrick and Thad.

THAD AND PATRICK
Merry Christmas!

EXT. STONE HOUSE - MORNING

Everett's car is pulled up, half on the driveway, two wheels on the lawn.

Just as the previous morning, the street is quiet, but for the pounding of footsteps from within the house.

INT. STONE HOUSE - FRONT STAIRS- MORNING

Elizabeth and Andrew pound down the stairs, heading for their Christmas stockings.

They pass Kelly, on his way up, with a mug of coffee.

ELIZABETH AND ANDREW
Merry Christmas, Grandpa!!

INT. STONE HOUSE - BEN'S BEDROOM - MORNING

Meredith stirs awake at the sound of footsteps.

She blinks, squinting against the light, and what must be a horrendous hangover. She is alone in bed, but there is the hiss of a shower running nearby.

She looks around the unfamiliar room, at the 70's rock posters and hippie funk.

MEREDITH
(realizing)
Oh my god.

INT. STONE HOUSE - UPSTAIRS HALLWAY - MORNING

Kelly comes down the hallway, sipping his coffee and stops at the closed door to Ben's room.

He knocks.

KELLY
Ben?

INT. STONE HOUSE - BEN'S BEDROOM - MORNING

Meredith hears Kelly. She also sees her clothes thrown on the floor next to the bed.

MEREDITH
Ohmygod. Ohmygod-Ohmygod-Ohmygod.

KELLY (O.S.)
(knocking again)
Ben?

Meredith reaches to gather her clothes as Kelly opens the bedroom door.

KELLY (CONT'D)
Ben--

Meredith is frozen; half in and half out of bed, the sheet wrapped around her, eyes screwed shut.

KELLY (CONT'D)
OH!! Excuse me.

Kelly closes the door quickly.

Meredith remains frozen.

INT. STONE HOUSE - UPSTAIRS HALLWAY - MORNING

Kelly stands with his hand still on the doorknob, blinking at the closed door.

INT. STONE HOUSE - BEN'S BEDROOM - MORNING

Kelly's footsteps sound as he walks down the hall.

Meredith falls back on the bed, throwing the sheet over her head.

She lets out a pinched moan.

INT. STONE HOUSE - SYBIL AND KELLY'S BEDROOM - MORNING

Kelly enters, visibly shaken.

KELLY
Sybil?

INT. STONE HOUSE - KITCHEN - MORNING

Sybil enters as Everett pours himself a cup of coffee.

EVERETT
Well, my car's back.

SYBIL
Merry Christmas.

Sybil gets her mug from the draining rack and sets it down next to Everett's. He fills it.

From the pocket of her bathrobe, Sybil removes an antique leather ring box and places this next to Everett's mug.

SYBIL (CONT'D)
Don't be an asshole. I said, merry Christmas.

Sybil takes her mug and moves to the table, where she busies herself with a stack of Christmas cards.

EVERETT
Dad put you up to this?

Sybil stops, sighs, and looks at Everett.

SYBIL
I think you and I need to get something straight--

EVERETT
(rolling his eyes)
Here we go.

KELLY
Sybil--

Kelly enters.

SYBIL
Not now, Kelly.

KELLY
Sybil, I--

SYBIL
Jesus, Kelly, I said, "not now!" I'm doing this thing!

Kelly makes a face and leaves.

Sybil turns her attention back to Everett.

SYBIL (CONT'D)
You've had a charmed life, kid. I blame myself.

EVERETT
(laughs)
Mom, you've never made anyone's life easier.

SYBIL
(laughing)
The fuck you know about it.

Everett, turns back to the counter for his coffee.

A beat.

SYBIL (CONT'D)
I'm sick, honey.

Everett's back stiffens.

SYBIL (CONT'D)
And you can't fix it.

Everett turns slowly to face his mother.

SYBIL (CONT'D)
Not even by getting married.

Everett stands at the counter looking at Sybil, who offers a sad smile.

A beat.

Everett picks up the ring box and comes to sit next to Sybil.

EVERETT
Mom--

SYBIL
Look, I know this is probably a really tall order, but do me a favor and try not to be so perfect. Alright?

Everett shakes his head, focusing on the ring box he turns in his hands.

EVERETT
(voice thick)
Mom. Believe me, I'm far from perfect--

SYBIL
I'd just hate for you to miss out because you've got some picture in your head.

She lays a hand on Everett.

SYBIL (CONT'D)
Or thought you could change something that you can't.

Everett puts his arms around his mother, hugging her tightly.

SYBIL (CONT'D)
I'd hate for you not to find what you really want.

Julie enters, headed for the coffee maker.

She freezes, mid stride, seeing Everett and Sybil.

JULIE
Oh.

Everett looks up, over Sybil's shoulder.

EVERETT
Julie!

JULIE
Oh--I'm sorry!

She does a fast about-face, but Everett leaps up from the table, releasing Sybil.

EVERETT
No! Julie, wait!

INT. STONE HOUSE - BEN'S BEDROOM - MORNING

Meredith dressed, attempts to smooth her hair into normalcy.

She opens the bedroom door a crack and peeks out.

Behind her, the adjoining bathroom door opens. Naked and wet, Ben uses a towel to dry his hair.

BEN
Merry Christmas!

Meredith nearly jumps out of her skin and slams the hall door closed.

BEN (CONT'D)
Sleep all right?

In three long strides, Meredith crosses the room, pulling her arm back, winding up.

INT. STONE HOUSE - LIVING ROOM - MORNING

BEN (O.S.)
OWWW!!

Kelly and Susannah and Patrick all glance up at the ceiling, hearing Ben.

Thad watches Andrew and Elizabeth who are intent on dumping their stockings. Elizabeth finds a **YM** magazine in hers.

ELIZABETH
Thanks, Uncle Thad!

INT. STONE HOUSE - KITCHEN - MORNING

JULIE
(painfully)
It's beautiful.

Everett takes his grandmother's ring out of the box.

EVERETT
Try it on.

JULIE
No!

EVERETT
Come on, try it on. I want to see if it fits.

JULIE
No. My hands are bigger than Meredith's, anyway.

EVERETT
Oh, come on, I just want to see--

SYBIL
Isn't that sort of bad luck?

JULIE
Very bad luck.

SYBIL
Yeah, Everett, that's bad luck.

EVERETT
I just want to see it on.

SYBIL
He just wants to see it on.

Kelly enters.

KELLY
Sybil, my love, is now a better time for you?

SYBIL
I'm not sure.

KELLY
What's going on?

Everett manages to slip the ring on Julie's finger.

It's as if a spell is cast. Julie is suddenly calm, entranced, bewitched. She stares at her hand, adorned with the ring, held in Everett's hand.

JULIE
Oh. Gosh. It really is beautiful.

Sybil looks from the ring to Everett, who seems as transfixed by Julie, then back to Julie and, finally, to Kelly.

Everett can't look away from Julie.

EVERETT
Beautiful.

SYBIL
(with dawning knowledge)
Oh, Jesus.

INT. STONE HOUSE - UPSTAIRS HALLWAY - MORNING

Meredith comes out of Ben's room.

Ben grabs her arm at the door, while trying to keep the towel up around his waist.

BEN
Meredith, wait!

MEREDITH
How dare you!

Meredith jerks her arm free and heads down the hall.

BEN
Wait! Meredith!

INT. STONE HOUSE - KITCHEN - MORNING

Julie looks at Everett, her face aglow.

EVERETT
What do you think?

SYBIL
I'll tell you what *I* think--

KELLY
(laying a hand on Everett)
Everett? What are you doing?

EVERETT
(softly)
Julie--

Julie pulls her hand from Everett and begins to remove the ring.

JULIE
It's a beautiful ring, Everett. I--

EVERETT
Julie, wait--

She suddenly looks down at the ring.

Her head snaps up and she looks at Sybil.

SYBIL
No.

JULIE
Just a sec.

Julie exerts a little more pressure on the ring.

EVERETT
What?

JULIE
Hold on.

Julie, becoming a little desperate, tries to unscrew the ring from her finger.

JULIE (CONT'D)
I can't, um, I can't--

SYBIL
Soap. We'll just use a little soap.

As a group, they all move to the sink, where Sybil squirts a great gob of dish washing liquid on Julie's hand and runs it under a stream of water.

Susannah enters.

SUSANNAH
Where'd everyone go? Come on, we want to open presents!

SYBIL
Anything?

Julie shakes her head, doing a remarkable job by not crying.

EVERETT
Is it stuck?

SUSANNAH
What's stuck?

JULIE
Of course, it's stuck! I told you, my hands are--

SYBIL
Butter.

Sybil retrieves a stick of butter from the fridge.

Patrick and Elizabeth wander in.

PATRICK
Hey, let's get the show on the road!

JULIE
Oh, *god*!

Sybil lathers Julie's hand up with butter.

SYBIL
(gently, regrettably)
I hate to say it, but be careful of the setting.

EVERETT
(to the newcomers)
She can't get it off.

JULIE
I'm not doing it on purpose!

PATRICK
Can't get what off?

ELIZABETH
Is she all right?

JULIE
I'm fine!

Thad enters.

THAD
Are we opening presents, or what?
(a beat)
Why is Julie crying?

JULIE
I'm not crying!

But she is.

Everyone looks at Julie.

She runs from the kitchen to bathroom off the back stairs.

INT. STONE HOUSE - BACK HALLWAY - DAY

A half second after the door slams, Meredith comes stealthily down the back stairs only to bump into Everett and Sybil.

MEREDITH
OH!

EVERETT
There you are! Where have you been?

MEREDITH
(brightly)
I just got here!

Kelly arrives, hearing Meredith's lie.

SYBIL
(knocking on the door)
Julie, dear, do you need some help?

MEREDITH
Julie?
(to everyone else)
What is she doing in there?
(calling)
Julie?

JULIE (O.S.)
Meredith, is that you?

MEREDITH
Julie, let me in.

The bathroom door opens a crack. Meredith goes in and closes the door behind herself.

AMY
What is all the racket?!

Amy enters from the kitchen, clearly having just woken up, at the same time that Ben comes down the stairs, pulling on a sweater.

BEN
Merry Christmas, everyone!

Kelly lunges across Sybil, Susannah and Patrick in order to slap the side of Ben's head.

BEN (CONT'D)
OWW! What was that for?

INT. STONE HOUSE - DOWNSTAIRS BATHROOM - DAY

Julie struggles with a bar of soap under the running tap.

MEREDITH
What's wrong? What are you doing?

JULIE
Oh, Meredith!

Julie holds up her red, swollen hand for Meredith to see.

MEREDITH
What is that?

JULIE
(hushed)
It's your wedding ring!

Meredith blinks.

INT. STONE HOUSE - BACK HALLWAY - DAY

Everyone is still idly clustered here.

MEREDITH (O.S.)
*OH, MY GOD!! JULIE!*

From another room, Sam barks in response.

SYBIL
Maybe we should give them a little room.

INT. STONE HOUSE - DOWNSTAIRS BATHROOM - DAY

MEREDITH
(miserable)
He's going to propose!

JULIE
If I can get the ring off.

MEREDITH
What are *you* doing with my wedding ring?

JULIE
It's stuck! He wanted to see it on!

MEREDITH
Why'd he want to see it on you?

JULIE
(changing subject)
Where were you last night?

Meredith looks at Julie and then drops her eyes.

MEREDITH
I can't tell you.

JULIE
What do you mean, you can't tell me?
(slowly it dawns on her)
No.

Meredith nods with feigned remorse.

JULIE (CONT'D)
Meredith, *no*. You didn't--

Meredith begins to smile, involuntarily. Mischievously.

MEREDITH
I'm so ashamed.

INT. STONE HOUSE - LIVING ROOM - DAY

Kelly shoves Ben into the room ahead of him.

BEN
Jesus, Kelly! *What?* What'd I do?

Kelly wags a finger at Ben but abandons a speech as everyone trails in behind them.

KELLY
(sternly, warningly)
I'm watching you, Mister.

Ben shrugs his hands up in the air, confused but silently proclaiming innocence anyway.

SUSANNAH
How'd she get it on her finger in the first place?

EVERETT
Well, I had her put it on--

PATRICK
You put a wedding ring on her finger?

AMY
*What*? You proposed to Julie--?

EVERETT
*No*, I didn't propose to--

SYBIL
(laughing)
Well, yeah, sort of, *you did.*

JULIE (O.S.)
*MEREDITH! NO!*

Everyone's head, but Thad's, swings in the direction of Julie's scream.

Sam barks.

The doorbell rings.

Everyone's head, but Thad's, swings in the direction of the front door.

AMY
Now, who the hell could that be?

Amy, still standing, moves toward the front hall.

EXT. STONE HOUSE - FRONT STEPS - DAY

Brad Stevenson stands nervously at the front door, holding a poinsettia plant and a brightly wrapped gift. He blows on his hands.

Brad's ambulance is parked behind him, out at the street's curb.

INT. STONE HOUSE - DOWNSTAIRS BATHROOM - DAY

MEREDITH
(miserable, beginning to cry)
I know! It's terrible! Don't you think I know?!

JULIE
Why did you bring me here?!

MEREDITH
Don't yell at me! I needed my sister!

JULIE
Oh, Meredith! How *could* you?

MEREDITH
I know! I know!
(a beat)
(MORE)

MEREDITH (CONT'D)
Let me see the ring again.
(a beat)
That's it?

EXT/INT. STONE HOUSE - FRONT STEPS/FRONT HALL - DAY

Amy opens the front door to find Brad.

AMY
Brad?

BRAD
(bashful)
Oh. Hi. Amy. Merry Christmas. I, uh--

AMY
Brad, what are you doing here?

BRAD
Meredith invited me.

INT. STONE HOUSE - LIVING ROOM - DAY

Andrew carries a present to Ben, who shakes it.

BEN
What do you think it is?

Amy and Brad enter the living room.

AMY
(on the war path)
Alright! Is Meredith out of the can yet?

BEN
Brad!

SYBIL
Brad!

Brad nods to everyone and gives Sybil the poinsettia.

BRAD
Merry Christmas, everyone. I hope I'm not interrupting. You see, I--

Meredith and Julie enter, their eyes red.

AMY
Here she is! Meredith, you know Brad.

MEREDITH
Oh my god. I forgot--!

Everett looks to Julie, who hides her hand and shakes her head.

AMY
Meredith, would you care to share with everyone just how it is that you know Brad?

BRAD
We were all at O'Malley's last night.

EVERETT
You guys were at O'Malley's?!

Ben opens the box in his lap and holds up a pink sweater.

BEN
Rock on, chili-dog! Donna Karan!

SUSANNAH
Filene's basement, women's department.

Everett crosses the room to Meredith.

EVERETT
Meredith, can I talk to you? In the kitchen?

MEREDITH
Um. No.

Meredith skitters away from Everett, smacking into Ben, as he stands up and strips off his sweater.

EVERETT
Meredith--

Meredith veers away from Ben who pulls on the new sweater.

BEN
Oh, man! It's cashmere. Feel me!

Ben throws himself on Susannah as Everett crosses the room to Meredith.

EVERETT
Meredith, we need to talk--

MEREDITH
Let's open presents! Me next! I have something for everyone!

Meredith takes a large canvas bag from beneath the tree and passes out identical flat boxes to all the adults.

Everyone just looks at the boxes in their laps.

MEREDITH (CONT'D)
Well, open them.

Susannah starts, getting Elizabeth and Andrew to help.

Nearly at the same time, everyone unwraps the same framed photograph of Sybil, taken sometime in the early '70's, pregnant with one of the children.

It's a black and white portrait, undoubtedly taken by Kelly.

MEREDITH (CONT'D)
I found the original in Everett's desk. I just thought it was so beautiful.

Everyone just stares, unprepared for Meredith's thoughtfulness, this sudden intimacy.

Sybil wags her framed picture at Amy.

SYBIL
(softly)
That's you and me, kid.

MEREDITH
(as if in apology)
Oh. I--I just assumed it must have been Everett.

No one says anything, each sitting with their copy of Sybil's picture.

Amy's lip trembles and she covers her face.

Brad tentatively puts an arm around Amy.

SYBIL
Meredith, thank you. You did good.

Meredith exhales and smiles, taking it in.

EVERETT
(leaning in, voice lowered)
Meredith, we need to--

Meredith steps closer into Everett and lowers her voice.

MEREDITH
Everett, *please*, I *know* what you're going to ask me--

Everett grabs Meredith by the wrist and she struggles to free herself.

EVERETT
That's just my point. I don't think you do. We need to--

MEREDITH
(brightly)
Brad! You look hungry! Breakfast is coming right up! I'll just pop the Strada in the oven--

EVERETT
Meredith--!

Meredith pulls against Everett's grip, like a horse trying to break free of a burning barn.

MEREDITH
Everett, *please*, don't!

EVERETT
Meredith, will--?

MEREDITH
*Everett*--!

EVERETT
Meredith! Will you *please*--

MEREDITH
No, Everett, I will not marry you!

EVERETT
--just stop talking and *listen?*!
(responding)
What?

MEREDITH
I'm *sorry*, Everett. I *can't* marry you.

Everett looks around the room and releases Meredith.

EVERETT
I...I didn't ask you.

MEREDITH
You--what?

EVERETT
You said--. I'm not asking you to marry me.

MEREDITH
I--. You're not? You didn't--?

Everett shakes his head slowly.

Meredith looks to Julie for help, but Julie looks away.

Meredith scans the room, and all the stunned faces turned towards her.

MEREDITH (CONT'D)
Well, that's just great. Isn't it? That's just perfect. Not like I haven't been humiliated enough--?

EVERETT
Meredith, it's not like that at all--

MEREDITH
(blinking back tears)
It's not?
(facing the room)
This isn't *exactly* the moment you've all been waiting for? You all *hate* me so much!

KELLY
No, Meredith, please--

MEREDITH
I know what you all see.
(a beat)
Meredith. The spoiled. Crazy. Racist. Bigot. Bitch from Bedford!
(increasingly vulnerable)
Right? That's what you all *think*. That's what you all *see*, when you look at me. Not good enough for Everett. Not like all of you.
(mimicking)
"She comes all the way up here to ruin our Christmas and then she sleeps with his brother!"

It's out before she knows it.

EVERETT
What?

MEREDITH
(almost inaudibly)
I slept with your brother.

EVERETT
You slept with who?

KELLY
With "whom--"

THAD
Don't look at me.

MEREDITH
Ben! I slept with Ben!

BEN
Whoa!! Back up a minute! Everett, I didn't--!

MEREDITH
Oh, what's the use? You did, too!

BEN
(gently, explaining)
Meredith, we did *not* sleep together.

MEREDITH
We didn't?

Ben shakes his head.

MEREDITH (CONT'D)
No?

BEN
(as if by sad apology)
No.

MEREDITH
*Doesn't ANYBODY love me?!*

Meredith flees the room, headed for the kitchen, leaving everyone to look at each other.

PATRICK
That girl is *always* runnin' out the room.

Everett turns and sees Julie, who has made herself as small as possible.

EVERETT
Julie--

Amy gets up and heads for the kitchen, followed by Sybil.

SYBIL
(to Ben)
Nice one, Big Guy.

BEN
*Me*?! I didn't!
(turning)
Everett, I'm sorry. I don't know--

Everett picks up a pile of presents and paper and hurls them at Ben.

EVERETT
What did you do?!

INT. STONE HOUSE - KITCHEN - DAY

Nerve wracked, Meredith tries to remove the trays of Strada from the fridge.

One completely slips from her grasp and hits the floor, splattering runny egg batter across the room.

Reflexively, she tries to hold the other tray as it slips, clutching it to her chest, where its entire contents wash down her front.

Amy and Sybil hustle into the kitchen, slipping and nearly falling on the egg-coated floor. Sam follows them and starts lapping up the giant puddle of eggs.

SYBIL
Oh, NO!

AMY
Meredith!

INT. STONE HOUSE - DINING ROOM - DAY

Everett chases Ben through the house, until they are on opposite sides of the dining room table, caught in the classic struggle of keeping equal distance between each other around its perimeter. Everett advances and Ben retreats.

BEN
I didn't do it! I swear! Nothing happened!

EVERETT
Then stop running from me!

BEN
Stop chasing me! I didn't do anything!

EVERETT
Then how can she think she slept with you?

BEN
Well, we were pretty stoned--

INT. STONE HOUSE - LIVING ROOM - DAY

Kelly gets up and heads for the dining room.

Andrew tries to follow him, but Susannah pulls him back.

Brad half-rises and extends a hand toward Julie.

BRAD
I'm sorry, I don't think we met.

INT. STONE HOUSE - KITCHEN - DAY

Sybil tries to comfort Meredith, who pathetically picks egg-soaked bread cut outs from her front.

SYBIL
Let's just get you cleaned up--

MEREDITH
(weeping)
*Why*? Why do you all hate me so much? What did I do?

SYBIL
(laughing)
Oh, honey. You said it yourself. You ruined our Christmas.

AMY
(also laughing)
Well, that, and now the fact that you are *such a slut!*

Despite herself, Meredith bursts out laughing, and the three women cluster, hugging.

But then, suddenly, Meredith is gagging and heaving.

MEREDITH
I'm going to be sick!

She turns from Sybil and tries to make it to the sink, but throws up on floor.

AMY
(laughing)
Oh *my god*!

Sam makes a bee-line for Meredith's vomit.

AMY (CONT'D)
Sam, NO! Oh, Mom, get him away from that!

INT. STONE HOUSE - DINING ROOM - DAY

KELLY
Okay, boys, that's enough of this nonsense!

Kelly steps in front of Everett, blocking him.

Ben dashes for the kitchen's swinging door.

INT. STONE HOUSE - KITCHEN - DAY

The door flies open, knocking Amy off balance, propelling her into Sybil, who bangs into Meredith, who gets slapped in the face by an open cupboard door.

Sliding on the eggs, Ben sails straight into Sam, who lets out a yelp.

Meredith's feet go out from under her and her legs become tangled with Sybil's. Sybil slips in the puddle of egg and vomit, landing on top of Meredith.

Everett blasts into the room from the other kitchen entrance and hits the puddle of eggs.

He sails right into Ben and Sam and the three bodies are swept the length of the room.

Sliding, they crash into the table which overturns, spilling the prepped Christmas dinner, a million Christmas cards and Sybil's computer.

Everything crashes to the floor, except the computer terminal which tumbles onto the seat of a chair that's tipped precariously on two legs.

Sam squirms out from under the brothers and lopes away, leaving Everett on top of Ben, who starts laughing.

BEN
Not my sweater! Ev, are you all right?

Everett turns, hiding his face from the room.

Andrew comes running in and his feet go out from under him. Amy grabs him by the arm and just keeps him from falling.

Brad, Susannah, Elizabeth, Patrick and Thad come to the doorway.

Sybil and Amy are laughing, tears streaming down their faces. Even, shockingly, Meredith is laughing.

BEN (CONT'D)
(still laughing)
Everett?

Everett turns to Ben. Fighting emotion, Everett is not laughing.

EVERETT
How could you do that? How could you do that to me?

Ben grabs Everett's face, the movement causing the chair and the computer monitor to shift.

BEN
I did do anything to you. Nothing happened. Ev, you're my brother. I love you. She was passed out. I slept on the floor. .

EVERETT
You swear?

BEN
Why do you care, Everett? You're not even in love her.

Everett rolls off Ben and turns his face away from everyone.

BEN (CONT'D)
You don't even love her, man.

Everett pushes Ben violently away, causing the monitor on the chair to slip.

MEREDITH
Ben!

Ben turns in Meredith's direction just as the computer monitor falls from the chair and hits him in the face.

EXT. STONE HOUSE - DAY

Brad Stevenson climbs out of the back door of his ambulance, with a large first aid kit, and heads for the house.

INT. STONE HOUSE - FRONT HALL - DAY

Brad enters through the front door, heading for the stairs.

Sybil sees Brad from the kitchen where she, Kelly, Thad, Patrick and Susannah are in the midst of cleaning up.

Sybil comes to stand in the kitchen doorway.

What she doesn't see is Julie, hugging close to the wall of the staircase, trying to stay out of Sybil's line of sight while she talks on the phone.

SYBIL
Brad, you need anything else?

BRAD
I think I've got everything under control. Thank you, Mrs. Stone.

Sybil levels a finger at Brad.

SYBIL
"Sybil," Brad.

Brad smiles at Sybil, nods, and heads up the stairs as Sybil returns her attention to the kitchen.

Julie, clutching an open Yellow Pages, watches Brad climb the stairs as she speaks on the phone.

JULIE
Yes, Bedford. Okay. Seven-thirty, from Amherst Common. Okay. Thanks. You, too. Merry Christmas.

Julie hangs up the phone.

As she turns her wrist to read the face of her watch, the ring slips from her finger and strikes the surface of the telephone table.

Julie looks down at the ring.

INT. STONE HOUSE - BEN'S BATHROOM - DAY

Amy swabs at a very bad cut over Ben's eye with a washcloth.

BEN
Nice to see Brad, isn't it?

AMY
Tell me, does this hurt?

She exerts pressure on Ben's wound.

BEN
Oww!! Careful.

Ben grabs Amy's wrist.

BEN (CONT'D)
You know, you can't be so in love with us, Amy. You gotta give people outside the family a chance.

BRAD (O.S.)
I'm back.

Brad enters and opens the first aid kit on the floor.

AMY
Hey, is Meredith alright?

BRAD
(laughing)
Oh man, you should see her.

INT. STONE HOUSE - EVERETT'S BATHROOM - DAY

Everett towels his hair dry and pulls on a sweatshirt.

INT. STONE HOUSE - EVERETT'S BEDROOM - DAY

Everett opens the bathroom door to find Meredith sitting silently on the edge of the foot of his bed.

She holds an ice pack up to her right eye, which is swollen shut and turning colors.

Everett looks at her for a moment, then wearily sits on the edge of his bed, as far from Meredith as possible.

Meredith clears her throat loudly in the silent room.

MEREDITH
Everett, I'm sorry--

EVERETT
I'm sorry for everything.

Meredith examines her ice pack, by way of not looking at Everett.

MEREDITH
You don't hate me, do you?

EVERETT
Of course, not.
(a beat)
I'm in love with Julie.

Meredith's whole face screws into a question mark.

MEREDITH
(seriously, not knowing)
Julie *who*?

Kelly knocks lightly on the open bedroom door.

KELLY
Everything alright in here?

MEREDITH
*Julie?!*

Meredith looks at Everett.

MEREDITH (CONT'D)
Where is Julie?

INT. STONE HOUSE - KITCHEN - DAY

Thad and Susannah continue to straighten the room while Patrick and Sybil check and baste the turkey.

Everett enters, already a little frantic.

EVERETT
Have you guys seen Julie?

SYBIL
Yeah, she's--
(looks around)
Isn't she in the living room?

SUSANNAH
Isn't she with Meredith?

INT. STONE HOUSE - BEN'S BEDROOM - DAY

Ben lies on his bed, his eye patched and bandaged.

Kelly enters.

KELLY
Ben, you haven't seen Julie, have you?

BEN
Did you ask Andrew? He knows all the good hiding places.

Kelly turns to leave and bumps into Meredith, just outside the door.

MEREDITH
I'm sorry. Excuse--

Kelly is about to move around Meredith when he stops.

He looks at her. She tries to meet his eyes.

Impulsively, Kelly reaches out and embraces Meredith.

Ben watches from his bed.

Kelly kisses the side of Meredith's head affectionately.

KELLY
You're going to be fine.

He heads down the hall.

EXT. STONE HOUSE - STREET - SUNSET

Amy approaches the open back door of Brad's ambulance.

Inside, Brad is stowing his kit.

Amy knocks on the open door.

Brad turns and smiles at her.

Amy holds up the wrapped present he'd brought.

AMY
Was this for me?

INT. STONE HOUSE - LIVING ROOM - DUSK

Sybil and Everett find Elizabeth and Andrew playing with their new presents.

SYBIL
Have you guys seen Julie?

ELIZABETH
(quickly)
No.

ANDREW
Yes! She told Elizabeth to give you that ring.

ELIZABETH
Andrew!

Elizabeth clutches the ring on her hand to her chest.

ANDREW
She said to say goodbye.

INT. STONE HOUSE - FRONT HALL - DUSK

Everett races from the living room to the front door as Kelly comes down the stairs.

EVERETT
She's gone! She left!

Everett grabs a coat and runs outside while Kelly veers off and heads for the kitchen.

EXT. STONE HOUSE - DUSK

Everett races out to the street, looking up and down its length, not even glancing at the ambulance.

He takes off at a run.

INT. AMBULANCE - DUSK

Amy holds up the snow globe Brad has given her.

The scene depicted within is that of a small figure pulling a child's sled across a New England landscape.

AMY
Wow, Brad.

She turns the globe, creating a blizzard within the sphere.

Just then, her eye is drawn to Kelly and Thad racing out of the side door of the house and climbing into Kelly's car.

AMY (CONT'D)
Where are they going?

EXT. STONE HOUSE - DUSK

Kelly backs the car out of the driveway fast, pulling up along side Brad's ambulance for an instant.

INT. AMBULANCE - DUSK

Amy cranes across Brad, shouting out the driver's window.

AMY
Where are you guys going?!

Kelly hits the accelerator and the car speeds away.

Amy holds her position, leaning across Brad, her hand braced on his chest.

She slowly turns her head and meets Brad's eyes.

Brad smiles at Amy, her face just inches away from his.

EXT. RESIDENTIAL STREET - DUSK

Everett runs along the silent street.

From behind him, Kelly's car pulls along side, keeping pace.

Thad reaches around and opens the back passenger door.

KELLY
Get in!

INT. STONE HOUSE - BEN'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

Meredith lies on the bed, next to Ben.

He touches her black eye.

She touches the cut above his eye.

BEN
A pair.

He kisses her black eye and tugs gently at her blouse.

BEN (CONT'D)
What do you say you get out of these clothes?

Meredith looks at Ben.

BEN (CONT'D)
You smell like puke.

EXT. JEFFREY AMHERST INN - NIGHT

Inside the Inn, Everett stands in front of the receptionist, who gestures at the door.

Everett turns from the counter and comes racing out to Kelly's car, where Kelly and Thad sit in the front seats.

EVERETT
(scanning the street)
Did you guys see her? The guy just said--

Over the roof of the car, Everett sees across the Common, where Julie lugs her heavy suitcase to the bus stop.

Kelly and Thad turn in the car, following Everett's gaze.

EXT. AMHERST TOWN COMMON - NIGHT

A thin flurry of snowflakes buzz around the globe of a streetlight, like summer moths.

Beneath the streetlight, Julie stands alone, waiting for her bus. She cranes out over the curb, looking down the length of the street.

EVERETT
Julie!

Startled, Julie looks directly across the street, where Everett stands on the edge of the Common.

The bus turns the distant corner and moves slowly toward them. They both look as it approaches.

INT. KELLY'S CAR - NIGHT

Kelly and Thad watch Everett cross the street to Julie.

EXT. AMHERST TOWN COMMON - NIGHT

EVERETT
You didn't even say good bye.

JULIE
You were a little busy.

EVERETT
Julie--

JULIE
My bus is here.

The bus pulls up with a pneumatic hiss.

EVERETT
You can't go.

JULIE
I have to.

EVERETT
I don't want you to.

JULIE
What do you want?

EVERETT
I want to know everything about you.

INT. KELLY'S CAR - NIGHT

Thad and Kelly's view is blocked by the bus.

They sit, breathlessly, waiting for it to move.

EXT. AMHERST TOWN COMMON - NIGHT

DRIVER
Merry Christmas!

JULIE
(murmurs)
Merry Christmas.

The bus DRIVER opens the baggage compartment and picks up Julie's bag.

BUS DRIVER
Is this it?

JULIE
Yes.

EVERETT
No!
(grabbing Julie)
You can't go.

JULIE
Everett.

EVERETT
Please. Stay, Julie.

JULIE
Everett.

Julie puts a hand on Everett's face and he kisses it.

He places his forehead on hers, keeping her hand near his mouth.

JULIE (CONT'D)
I can't.

EVERETT
You know why I didn't ask her--

JULIE
It's too much. I'm...It's too much for me.

EVERETT
No. It's not. It's not too much. Just. Stay.
(whispers)
Stay. Stay.

Everett moves his mouth closer to Julie's, and they kiss.

Julie pulls back and looks at Everett.

EVERETT (CONT'D)
Okay?

INT. KELLY'S CAR - NIGHT

Kelly and Thad watch as the bus pulls away.

Everett stands alone under the streetlight.

EXT. AMHERST TOWN COMMON - NIGHT

The bus trundles down the empty street.

Everett watches the bus as it moves away from him.

Suddenly, the brake lights are illuminated.

INT. STONE HOUSE - BEN'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

Meredith lifts her head from the pillow she shares with Ben as he slips his arm around her, under her neck.

BEN
Comfortable?

Meredith nods. She's changed into a thread-bare concert T-shirt, surely one of Ben's.

Lying on top of the covers, they both look at the ceiling, watching the shadows cast by the falling snow outside.

BEN (CONT'D)
(singing at a whisper)
"While fields and floods, rocks, hills and plains, repeat the sounding joy, repeat the sounding joy, repeat--"

MEREDITH
Closer.

Ben pulls Meredith nearer to him.

BEN
"Repeat the sounding joy."

EXT. AMHERST TOWN COMMON - NIGHT

At a run, Everett reaches the passenger door of the bus as it slides open.

Julie appears at the top of the bus stairs, tears streaming down her face.

JULIE
Everett...I just...

EVERETT
Julie...

They embrace.

JULIE
I just...I wanted to ask if you're doing anything for New Years.

INT. KELLY'S CAR - NIGHT

Thad and Kelly watch as the bus pulls away again.

Everett is still alone. He watches the bus as it drives down the street and turns the corner, and disappears.

He stands for a moment, and then turns and begins the slow walk back to the car and his father and his brother, through the increasing snow fall.

Kelly puts his arm around Thad as they watch Everett cross the Common.

THAD
I love you, Dad.

Kelly kisses Thad's head.

KELLY
Me, too.

EXT. STONE HOUSE - NIGHT

Sybil stands at the kitchen window watching the snow falling outside.

INT. STONE HOUSE - KITCHEN - NIGHT

Behind Sybil, Patrick pulls the turkey from the oven and sets it on the stove.

PATRICK
Sybil.

JOHN (O.S.)
Hello?! Merry Christmas!

ANDREW AND ELIZABETH (O.S.)
Daddy! Daddy!

SUSANNAH
John!

JOHN TROUSDALE enters. He is sleek and handsome in a suit and top coat. He is in his late thirties or early forties. He carries Andrew while Elizabeth clings to his leg.

JOHN
Merry Christmas.

SUSANNAH
John.

John crosses to Susannah and they kiss. Susannah hugs him a little tighter.

JOHN
Okay. Let's start with, who's the guy Amy's making out with in the ambulance?

Patrick gently lays a hand on Sybil's shoulder.

PATRICK
Sybil.

Sybil turns from the dark glass of the window, slowly focusing on Patrick.

PATRICK (CONT'D)
It's ready.

Sybil smiles softly.

SYBIL
It's snowing.

Suddenly, the siren from Brad's ambulance can be heard.

Everyone looks at each other.

EXT. STONE HOUSE - NIGHT

The snow comes down hard, strobed by bands of light from the flashers on Brad's ambulance.

INT. AMBULANCE - NIGHT

Amy's snow globe sits on the dashboard of the vehicle.

The small figure within is swept by the red and white ambulance lights, and the dancing shadows created by the falling snow on the other side of the windshield.

DISSOLVE TO:

EXT. AMHERST TOWN COMMON - NIGHT

All alone, seemingly in the very center of the snow storm, Everett continues moving across the Common to Kelly's car.

He turns once, to look back towards the corner around which Julie's bus disappeared.

A beat.

He turns again and heads for the car.

Slowly, a smile finds its way onto his face.

And then he grins.

CUT TO BLACK.

*FADE IN:*

EXT. STONE HOUSE - DAY

The house sits back on a snowy lawn.

A Range Rover pulls up in the driveway to the left side of the house, near the side kitchen door and its steps.

Kelly, Amy and Susannah's cars sit deeper in the drive.

Thad and Patrick climb out of the car.

Patrick goes to the back of the car and unloads groceries.

Thad opens one of the rear passenger doors and lifts their AFRICAN-AMERICAN INFANT from a child carrier. He shoulders a diaper bag.

INT. STONE HOUSE - BACK HALL - DAY

Sam meets Thad and Patrick at the back door, barking and jumping, a profusion of Christmas ornaments hanging from his collar.

PATRICK
Back up, Sam!
(calling)
Merry Christmas!

SUSANNAH (O.S.)
Hey, you guys!

INT. STONE HOUSE - KITCHEN - DAY

Patrick and Thad enter to find Susannah stringing popcorn and cranberries at the kitchen table, her BABY GIRL in her arms.

SUSANNAH
(to her baby)
Look, Frannie! It's your cousin Gus!

Thad brings Gus over to the table as Patrick sets the groceries on the counter.

THAD
Are they here yet?

SUSANNAH
Well, of course, Ben and Meredith missed the morning flight, but Everett and Julie should have been here by--

KELLY
Thad! Patrick!

Kelly enters through the basement door in the back hall, followed by Amy. They both carry old cardboard cartons.

THAD
Dad!

Kelly puts his carton down and embraces everyone. He takes Gus from Thad and tosses him in the air.

KELLY
Look at this young man! He is the king of kings! King Gus!

SUSANNAH
(to Amy)
Any luck?

AMY
(shaking her head)
Still can't find the stockings.

BRAD (O.S.)
We're ready!

INT. STONE HOUSE - LIVING ROOM - DAY

AMY
We've got more ornaments!

Amy enters with Sam, giving the cartons over to Elizabeth and Andrew who dig into them. Sam noses around in the boxes.

Kelly carries Gus in, followed by Thad, Patrick and Susannah.

JOHN
Is everybody set?

John holds an extension cord and the cord to the lights of the still-dark Christmas tree.

JOHN (CONT'D)
Brad? Ready?

Brad, on a ladder, makes an adjustment to the lights at the top of the tree.

BRAD
"And now," cried Max, "let the wild rumpus start!"

John connects the cords and the tree springs to life with light.

Everyone voices their appreciation in "Ah"s.

Susannah looks at Kelly, silently holding Gus, as he takes in the tree.

SUSANNAH
It's a good tree, Daddy.

Kelly puts his arm around his daughter.

KELLY
It is.
(voice thick with emotion)
It is a good tree.

Elizabeth unwraps the snowflake ornament from tissue and holds it up for Amy, who watches Kelly and Susannah.

ELIZABETH
(excitedly)
Look at this one!

Amy takes the ornament from Elizabeth and turns it in her hand.

As Andrew hangs another ornament on Sam's collar, the dog hears the back door open and takes off, barking.

EVERETT (O.S.)
Hello! Anyone home?

SUSANNAH
They're here!

JULIE (O.S.)
Merry Christmas!

Everyone heads out of the room to greet Everett and Julie, leaving Amy, holding the ornament, and Brad, who begins to climb down from the ladder.

Brad hesitates in his descent, seeing Amy staring into the depths of the tree.

He watches as she moves forward and hangs the snowflake ornament with elaborate care.

She steps back and regards the tree.

BRAD
You okay?

Amy turns to Brad and nods, smiling, though tears hang in her eyes.

Brad climbs down from the ladder, revealing the framed portrait of Sybil, pregnant with Amy, that hangs on the wall behind him.

In the reflection of the frame's glass, Brad goes to Amy.

They kiss lightly, and Amy snakes her arms around Brad, hugging him. Together, the two walk toward the kitchen and the bright call of family voices.

Slowly, the focus shifts, until the photograph of Sybil is clear at last.

SLOW FADE TO BLACK.